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MARK TWAIN

Reflections on Religion[1]

Edited by CHARLES NEIDER

The following thoughts on religion were dictated by Mark Twain in June 1906, approximately four years prior to his death. They are now published for the first time.

In his official biography of Clemens, issued in 1912, Albert Bigelow Paine quoted from the chapters but did not identify them. He offered a few fragments as musings or table talk and scattered them about, abridging, rewriting and rearranging. His edition of the Autobiography (Mark Twain's Autobiography, *1924*) *omitted the chapters, although he could have printed them if he had wished, inasmuch as he was Mark Twain's literary executor and the editor of the Mark Twain Estate. Bernard DeVoto made an effort to publish them in 1940 in* Mark Twain in Eruption, *which culled material from the unpublished sections of the Autobiography. It was at the request of Mark Twain's daughter, then Mrs. Clara Gabrilowitsch, that DeVoto withheld them from the public. Three of the chapters have pencilled on their title pages, "Edited, for publication in* Mark Twain in Eruption, *but omitted at the request of Mme. Gabrilowitsch." In his introduction to* Mark Twain in Eruption, *DeVoto made the surprising mistake of assuming responsibility not only for what he had included in the volume, but also for everything he had omitted, a sweeping gesture which necessarily included the chapters which had been refused him.*

While I was preparing my own edition of the Autobiography (The Autobiography of Mark Twain, *1959*) *I asked Mark Twain's daughter, now Mrs. Clara Samossoud, to reconsider the matter after the lapse of eighteen years. Her decision was that no good could come from the publication of the chapters. She and her husband felt especially that to publish them would be to give aid and comfort to the anti-religious Soviet Union. There was perhaps another reason for her suppressing the chapters, one which she*

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did not mention to me: the offense she must have taken because of her father's comments on Mary Baker Eddy. Mrs. Samossoud was a Christian Scientist. Also, she was old and her health was precarious. Her husband feared that the publication of the chapters would release a deluge of fanatical mail upon her. Unlike DeVoto, in the introduction to my edition I expressly divorced myself from responsibility in the matter of suppressing the chapters. This did not prevent the Literary Gazette *of Moscow from accusing me of wilful censorship, as well as crying out that Mark Twain was being censored officially in his own country. From time to time in my correspondence with Mrs. Samossoud I urged that the chapters be released, pointing out, among other things, that their suppression was giving the very aid and comfort to the Russians which she had feared their publication would give them. On the occasion of the appearance of the English edition of* The Autobiography of Mark Twain *in 1960, shortly before the 125th anniversary of Clemens's birth on November 30th of that year, I once again asked Mrs. Samossoud to change her mind. This time she consented. She went even further and lifted the ban on all her father's unpublished work. Still other (although relatively minor) obstacles presented themselves, which is why it is only now that the chapters make their first public appearance.*

Clemens dictated the chapters in a rented house a couple of miles from Dublin, New Hampshire. This was the Upton House, located on a slope of Mt. Monadnock. With him during the summer of 1906 were his daughter Jean, a stenographer (Miss Josephine Hobby), and Paine. Clemens's wife had died two years previously in Florence, Italy. Clara Clemens lived at this time in a retreat under her physician's care in Norfolk, Conn. It was a pleasant summer environment outside of Dublin, although Paine found it somewhat spectral, perhaps because of a west wind that never seemed to relent. Clemens's mornings were chiefly devoted to dictating his Autobiography. Paine, who lodged in the village for the summer, would drive up to the house each morning to be present for the session, sometimes returning in the afternoon to interview Clemens. Whenever the weather permitted, Clemens dictated while pacing a long colonnaded veranda open to the country views, or while sitting in a rocker. These are the veranda and rocker pictured in the famous series of seven photographs of Clemens which

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Paine, a former photographer, took that August and which Clemens inserted in his Autobiography. On rainy days Clemens worked indoors, pacing constantly. After work there would be relaxation with music, usually Beethoven, Chopin or Schubert.

On Sunday, June 17, 1906, Clemens wrote to his friend William Dean Howells, who was at Kittery Point, Maine, "Tomorrow I mean to dictate a chapter which will get my heirs & assigns burnt alive if they venture to print it this side of 2006 A.D.—which I judge they won't. There'll be lots of such chapters if I live 3 or 4 years longer. The edition of A.D. 2006 will make a stir when it comes out. I shall be hovering around taking notice, along with other dead pals. You are invited." The next day Clemens began a dictation on a religious subject but almost immediately strayed to other topics. On the 19th he composed the first of the chapters, on the 20th the second, on the 22nd and 23rd the third and fourth, and on the 25th he dictated the final chapter. The next day he went to New York for business reasons and wrote to Howells in the evening. "I have been dictating some fearful things, for 4 successive mornings—for no eye but yours to see until I have been dead a century—if then. But I got them out of my system, where they had been festering for years—& that was the main thing. I feel better now."

Writing to Howells, Clemens dared his heirs and assigns to print the chapters a century thence. But on his own manuscripts he specifically prohibited his heirs and assigns from publishing the chapters until five centuries thence. His injunction is penned in his own hand on the title pages of two of the chapters: "Not to be exposed to any eye until the edition of A.D. 2406. S. L. C."

—CHARLES NEIDER

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One

Tuesday, June 19, 1906

OUR BIBLE REVEALS TO US the character of our God with minute and remorseless exactness. The portrait is substantially that of a man—if one can imagine a man charged and overcharged with evil impulses far beyond the human limit; a personage whom no one, perhaps, would desire to associate with now that Nero and Caligula are dead. In the Old Testament His acts expose His vindictive, unjust, ungenerous, pitiless and vengeful nature constantly. He is always punishing—punishing trifling misdeeds with thousandfold severity; punishing innocent children for the misdeeds of their parents; punishing unoffending populations for the misdeeds of their rulers; even descending to wreak bloody vengeance upon harmless calves and lambs and sheep and bullocks as punishment for inconsequential trespasses committed by their proprietors. It is perhaps the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere. It makes Nero an angel of light and leading by contrast.

It begins with an inexcusable treachery, and that is the keynote of the entire biography. That beginning must have been invented in a pirate's nursery, it is so malign and so childish. To Adam is forbidden the fruit of a certain tree—and he is gravely informed that if he disobeys he shall die. How could that be expected to impress Adam? Adam was merely a man in stature; in knowledge and experience he was in no way the superior of a baby of two years of age; he could have no idea of what the word death meant. He had never seen a dead thing; he had never heard of a dead thing before. The word meant nothing to him. If the Adam child had been warned that if he ate of the apples he would be transformed into a meridian of longitude, that threat would have been the equivalent of the other, since neither of them could mean anything to him.

The watery intellect that invented the memorable threat could be depended on to supplement it with other banalities and low grade notions of justice and fairness, and that is what happened. It was decreed that all of Adam's descendants, to the latest day, should be punished for the baby's trespass against a law of his nursery fulminated against him before he was out of his diapers. For thousands and thousands of years his posterity, individual by

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individual, has been unceasingly hunted and harried with afflictions in punishment of the juvenile misdemeanor which is grandiloquently called Adam's Sin. And during all that vast lapse of time there has been no lack of rabbins and popes and bishops and priests and parsons and lay slaves eager to applaud this infamy, maintain the unassailable justice and righteousness of it, and praise its Author in terms of flattery so gross and extravagant that none but a God could listen to it and not hide His face in disgust and embarrassment. Hardened to flattery as our Oriental potentates are through long experience, not even they would be able to endure the rank quality of it which our God endures with complacency and satisfaction from our pulpits every Sunday.

We brazenly call our God the source of mercy, while we are aware all the time that there is not an authentic instance in history of His ever having exercised that virtue. We call Him the source of morals, while we know by His history and by His daily conduct as perceived with our own senses that He is totally destitute of anything resembling morals. We call Him Father, and not in derision, although we would detest and denounce any earthly father who should inflict upon his child a thousandth part of the pains and miseries and cruelties which our God deals out to His children every day, and has dealt out to them daily during all the centuries since the crime of creating Adam was committed.

We deal in a curious and laughable confusion of notions concerning God. We divide Him in two, bring half of Him down to an obscure and infinitesimal corner of the world to confer salvation upon a little colony of Jews—and only Jews, no one else—and leave the other half of Him throned in Heaven and looking down and eagerly and anxiously watching for results. We reverently study the history of the earthly half and deduce from it the conviction that the earthly half has reformed, is equipped with morals and virtues, and in no way resembles the abandoned, malignant half that abides upon the throne. We conceive that the earthly half is just, merciful, charitable, benevolent, forgiving and full of sympathy for the sufferings of mankind and anxious to remove them. Apparently we deduce this character not by examining facts but by diligently declining to search them, measure them and weigh them. The earthly half requires us to be merciful and sets us an example by inventing a lake of fire and brimstone in which all of us who fail to recognize and worship Him as God are to be

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burned through all eternity. And not only *we,* who are offered these terms, are to be thus burned if we neglect them, but also the earlier billions of human beings are to suffer this awful fate, although they all lived and died without ever having heard of Him or the terms at all. This exhibition of mercifulness may be called gorgeous. We have nothing approaching it among human savages, nor among the wild beasts of the jungle. We are required to forgive our brother seventy times seven times and be satisfied and content if on our death-bed, after a pious life, our soul escape from our body before the hurrying priest can get to us and furnish it a pass with his mumblings and candles and incantations. This example of the forgiving spirit may also be pronounced gorgeous.

We are told that the two halves of our God are only seemingly disconnected by their separation; that in very fact the two halves remain one, and equally powerful, notwithstanding the separation. This being the case, the earthly half—who mourns over the sufferings of mankind and would like to remove them, and is quite competent to remove them at any moment He may choose—satisfies Himself with restoring sight to a blind person here and there instead of restoring it to all the blind; cures a cripple here and there instead of curing all the cripples; furnishes to five thousand famishing persons a meal and lets the rest of the millions that are hungry remain hungry—and all the time He admonishes inefficient man to cure these ills which God Himself inflicted upon him, and which He could extinguish with a word if He chose to do it, and thus do a plain duty which He had neglected from the beginning and always will neglect while time shall last. He raised several dead persons to life. He manifestly regarded this as a kindness. If it was a kindness it was not just to confine it to half-a-dozen persons. He should have raised the rest of the dead. I would not do it myself, for I think the dead are the only human beings who are really well off—but I merely mention it in passing as one of those curious incongruities with which our Bible history is heavily overcharged.

Whereas the God of the Old Testament is a fearful and repulsive character He is at least consistent. He is frank and outspoken. He makes no pretense to the possession of a moral or a virtue of any kind—except with His mouth. No such thing is anywhere discoverable in His conduct. I think He comes infinitely nearer to being respectworthy than does His reformed self as guilelessly

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exposed in the New Testament. Nothing in all history—nor even His massed history combined—remotely approaches in atrocity the invention of Hell.

His heavenly self, His Old Testament self, is sweetness and gentleness and respectability, compared with His reformed earthly self. In Heaven he claims not a single merit and hasn't one—outside of those claimed by His mouth—whereas in the earth He claims every merit in the entire catalogue of merits, yet practised them only now and then, penuriously, and finished by conferring Hell upon us, which abolished all His fictitious merits in a body.

Two

Wednesday, June 20, 1906

There are one or two curious defects about Bibles. An almost pathetic poverty of invention characterizes them all. That is one striking defect. Another is that each pretends to originality without possessing any. Each borrows from the others and gives no credit, which is a distinctly immoral act. Each in turn confiscates decayed old stage-properties from the others and with naïve confidence puts them forth as fresh new inspirations from on high. We borrow the Golden Rule from Confucius after it has seen service for centuries and copyright it without a blush. When we want a Deluge we go away back to hoary Babylon and borrow it, and are as proud of it and as satisfied with it as if it had been worth the trouble. We still revere it and admire it to-day and claim that it came to us direct from the mouth of the Deity; whereas we know that Noah's flood never happened, and couldn't have happened. The flood is a favorite with Bible makers. If there is a Bible—or even a tribe of savages—that lacks a General Deluge it is only because the religious scheme that lacks it hadn't any handy source to borrow it from.

Another prime favorite with the authors of sacred literature and founders of religions is the Immaculate Conception. It had been worn threadbare before we adopted it as a fresh new idea—and we admire it as much now as did the original conceiver of it when his mind was delivered of it a million years ago. The Hindus prized it ages ago when they acquired Krishna by the Immaculate process.

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The Buddhists were happy when they acquired Gautama by the same process twenty-five hundred years ago. The Greeks of the same period had great joy in it when their Supreme Being and his cabinet used to come down and people Greece with mongrels half human and half divine. The Romans borrowed the idea from Greece and found great happiness in Jupiter's Immaculate Conception products. We got it direct from Heaven, by way of Rome. We are still charmed with it. And only a fortnight ago, when an Episcopal clergyman in Rochester was summoned before the governing body of his church to answer the charge of intimating that he did not believe that the Savior was miraculously conceived, the Rev. Dr. Briggs, who is perhaps the most daringly broad-minded religious person now occupying an American pulpit, took up the cudgels in favor of the Immaculate Conception in an article in the *North American Review,* and from the tone of that article it seemed apparent that he believed he had settled that vexed question once and for all.[2] His idea was that there could be no doubt about it, for the reason that the Virgin Mary knew it was authentic because the Angel of the Annunciation told her so. Also, it must have been so, for the additional reason that Jude—a later son of Mary, the Virgin, and born in wedlock—was still living and associating with the adherents of the early church many years after the event, and that he said quite decidedly that it was a case of Immaculate Conception; therefore it must be true, for Jude was right there in the family and in a position to know.

If there is anything more amusing than the Immaculate Conception doctrine it is the quaint reasonings whereby ostensibly intelligent human beings persuade themselves that the impossible fact is proven.

If Dr. Briggs were asked to believe in the Immaculate Conception process as exercised in the cases of Krishna, Osiris, Buddha and the rest of the tribe he would decline with thanks and probably

[2] The article is "Criticism and Dogma," by Charles Augustus Briggs, Vol. 182, June 1906, pp. 861-74. Briggs does not mention a Rochester clergyman, nor does he "take up the cudgels" in any apparent sense. More important, he does not once mention the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Instead, he discusses the doctrine of the Virgin Birth at length and in detail, although not, to my mind, coherently or even sensibly. Mark Twain, on the other hand, discusses the Immaculate Conception, and discusses it as though it were identical with the Virgin Birth. Apparently he missed the point that the Immaculate Conception refers to the conception of Mary and not to that of Jesus. In his *Mark Twain in Eruption* (p. 317) DeVoto noted, "Throughout Mark Twain's writing, he confuses the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception with that of the Virgin Birth of Christ."—C. N.

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be offended. If pushed, he would probably say that it would be childish to believe in those cases, for the reason that they were supported by none but human testimony and that it would be impossible to prove such a thing by human testimony, because if the entire human race were present at a case of Immaculate Conception they wouldn't be able to tell when it happened, nor whether it happened at all—and yet this bright man with the temporarily muddy mind is quite able to believe an impossibility whose authenticity rests entirely upon human testimony—the testimony of but one human being, the Virgin herself, a witness not disinterested, but powerfully interested; a witness incapable of knowing the fact as a fact, but getting all that she supposed she knew about it at second hand—at second hand from an entire stranger, an alleged angel, who could have been an angel, perhaps, but also could have been a tax collector. It is not likely that she had ever seen an angel before or knew their trade-marks. He was a stranger. He brought no credentials. His evidence was worth nothing at all to anybody else in the community. It is worth nothing to-day to any but minds which are like Dr. Briggs's—which have lost their clarity through mulling over absurdities in the pious wish to dig something sane and rational out of them. The Immaculate Conception rests wholly upon the testimony of a single witness—a witness whose testimony is without value—a witness whose very existence has nothing to rest upon but the assertion of the young peasant wife whose husband needed to be pacified. Mary's testimony satisfied him but that is because he lived in Nazareth instead of New York. There isn't any carpenter in New York that would take the testimony at par. If the Immaculate Conception could be repeated in New York to-day there isn't a man, woman or child of those four millions who would believe in it—except perhaps some addled Christian Scientists. A person who can believe in Mother Eddy wouldn't strain at an Immaculate Conception, or six of them in a bunch. The Immaculate Conception could not be repeated successfully in New York in our day. It would produce laughter, not reverence and adoration.

To a person who doesn't believe in it, it seems a most puerile invention. It could occur to nobody but a god that it was a large and ingenious arrangement and had dignity in it. It could occur to nobody but a god that a divine Son procured through promiscuous relations with a peasant family in a village could improve the

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purity of the product, yet that is the very idea. The product acquires purity—purity absolute—purity from all stain or blemish —through a gross violation of both human and divine law, as set forth in the constitution and by-laws of the Bible. Thus the Christian religion, which requires everybody to be moral and to obey the laws, has its very beginning in immorality and in disobedience to law. You couldn't purify a tomcat by the Immaculate Conception process.

Apparently as a pious stage-property it is still useful, still workable, although it is so bent with age and so nearly exhausted by overwork. It is another case of begats. What's-his-name begat Krishna, Krishna begat Buddha, Buddha begat Osiris, Osiris begat the Babylonian deities, they begat God, He begat Jesus, Jesus begat Mrs. Eddy. If she is going to continue the line and do her proper share of the begatting, she must get at it, for she is already an antiquity.

There is one notable thing about our Christianity: bad, bloody, merciless, money-grabbing and predatory as it is—in our country particularly, and in all other Christian countries in a somewhat modified degree—it is still a hundred times better than the Christianity of the Bible, with its prodigious crime—the invention of Hell. Measured by our Christianity of to-day, bad as it is, hypocritical as it is, empty and hollow as it is, neither the Deity nor His Son is a Christian, nor qualified for that moderately high place. Ours is a terrible religion. The fleets of the world could swim in spacious comfort in the innocent blood it has spilt.

Three

Friday, June 22, 1906

For two years now Christianity has been repeating in Russia the sort of industries in the way of massacre and mutilation with which it has been successfully persuading Christendom in every century for nineteen hundred years that it is the only right and true religion—the one and only religion of peace and love. For two years now the ultra-Christian Government of Russia has been officially ordering and conducting massacres of its Jewish subjects. These massacres have been so frequent that we have become al-

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most indifferent to them. The accounts of them hardly affect us more than do accounts of corners in a railroad stock in which we have no money invested. We have become so used to their described horrors that we hardly shudder now when we read of them.

Here are some of the particulars of one of the latest efforts of these humble Twentieth Century disciples to persuade the unbeliever to come into the fold of the meek and gentle Savior.[3]

> Horrible details have been sent out by the correspondent of the Bourse Gazette, who arrived in Bialystok in company with Deputy Schepkin on Saturday, and who managed to send his story by a messenger Sunday afternoon. The correspondent, who accompanied Schepkin directly to the hospital escorted by a Corporal's guard, says he was utterly unnerved by the sights he witnessed there.
>
> "Merely saying that the bodies were mutilated," the correspondent writes, "fails to describe the awful facts. The faces of the dead have lost all human resemblance. The body of Teacher Apstein lay on the grass with the hands tied. In the face and eyes had been hammered three-inch nails. Rioters entered his home, killing him thus, and then murdered the rest of his family of seven. When the body arrived at the hospital it was also marked with bayonet thrusts.
>
> "Beside the body of Apstein lay that of a child of 10 years, whose leg had been chopped off with an axe. Here also were the dead from the Schlachter home, where, according to witnesses, soldiers came and plundered the house and killed the wife, son, and a neighbor's daughter and seriously wounded Schlachter and his two daughters.
>
> "I am told that soldiers entered the apartments of the Lapidus brothers, which were crowded with people who had fled from the streets for safety, and ordered the Christians to separate themselves from the Jews. A Christian student named Dikar protested and was killed on the spot. Then all of the Jews were shot."
>
> From the wounded in the hospital the correspondent heard many pitiable stories, all of the same general tenor. Here is the account of a badly wounded merchant named Nevyazhiky:
>
> "I live in the suburbs. Learning of the pogrom, I tried to reach the town through the fields, but was intercepted by roughs. My brother was killed, my arm and leg were broken, my skull was fractured, and I was stabbed twice in the side. I fainted from loss of blood, and revived to find a soldier standing over me, who asked: 'What, are you still alive! Shall I bayonet you?' I begged him to spare my life. The roughs again came, but spared me, saying: 'He will die; let him suffer longer.' "
>
> The correspondent, who adopts the bitterest tone toward the government, holds that the pogrom undoubtedly was provoked, and

[3] The name and date of the newspaper from which the following clipping was taken are not given. The clipping no doubt referred to the massacre of Jews, June 15, 1906, in Bialystok, instigated by government officials.—C. N.

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attributes the responsibility to Police Lieutenant Sheremetieff. He declares that not only the soldiers, but their officers, participated, and that he himself was a witness as late as Saturday to the shooting down of a Jewish girl from the window of a hotel by Lieut. Miller of the Vladimir Regiment. The Governor of the Province of Grodno, who happened to be passing at the moment, ordered an investigation.

The pulpit and the optimist are always talking about the human race's steady march toward ultimate perfection. As usual, they leave out the statistics. It is the pulpit's way—the optimist's way.

Is there any discoverable advance toward moderation between the massacre of the Albigenses and these massacres of Russian Jews? There is one difference. In elaborate cruelty and brutality the modern massacre exceeds the ancient one. Is any advance discoverable between Bartholomew's Day and these Jewish massacres? Yes. The same difference again appears: the modern Russian Christian and his Czar have advanced to an extravagance of bloody and bestial atrocity undreamed of by their crude brethren of three hundred and thirty-five years ago.

The Gospel of Peace is always making a good deal of noise with its mouth; always rejoicing in the progress it is making toward final perfection, and always diligently neglecting to furnish the statistics. George the Third reigned sixty years, the longest reign in English history up to his time. When his revered successor, Victoria, turned the sixty-year corner—thus scoring a new long-reign record—the event was celebrated with great pomp and circumstance and public rejoicing in England and her colonies. Among the statistics fetched out for general admiration were these: that for each year of the sixty of her reign Victoria's Christian soldiers had fought in a separate and distinct war. Meantime the possessions of England had swollen to such a degree by depredations committed upon helpless and godless pagans that there were not figures enough in Great Britain to set down the stolen acreage and they had to import a lot from other countries.

There are no peaceful nations now except those unhappy ones whose borders have not been invaded by the Gospel of Peace. All Christendom is a soldier-camp. During all the past generation the Christian poor have been taxed almost to starvation-point to support the giant armaments which the Christian Governments have built up, each to protect itself from the rest of the brotherhood and, incidentally, to snatch any patch of real estate left exposed by its savage owner. King Leopold II of Belgium—probably the most

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intensely Christian monarch, except Alexander the Sixth,[4] that has escaped Hell thus far—has stolen an entire kingdom in Africa, and in the fourteen years of Christian endeavor there has reduced the population of thirty millions to fifteen by murder, mutilation, overwork, robbery, rapine—confiscating the helpless native's very labor and giving him nothing in return but salvation and a home in Heaven, furnished at the last moment by the Christian priest.[5]

Within this last generation each Christian power has turned the bulk of its attention to finding out newer and still newer and more and more effective ways of killing Christians—and, incidentally, a pagan now and then—and the surest way to get rich quickly in Christ's earthly kingdom is to invent a gun that can kill more Christians at one shot than any other existing gun.

Also, during the same generation each Christian Government has played with its neighbors a continuous poker game in the naval line. In this game France puts up a battleship; England sees that battleship and goes it one battleship better; Russia comes in and raises it a battleship or two—*did,* before the untaught stranger entered the game and reduced her stately pile of chips to a damaged ferryboat and a cruiser that can't cruise. We are in it ourselves now. This game goes on and on and on. There is never a new shuffle; never a new deal. No player ever calls another's hand. It is merely an unending game of put up and put up and put up; and by the law of probabilities a day is coming when no Christians will be left on the land, except the women. The men will all be at sea, manning the fleets.

This singular game, which is so costly and so ruinous and so silly, is called statesmanship—which is different from assmanship on account of the spelling. Anybody but a statesman could invent some way to reduce these vast armaments to rational and sensible and safe police proportions, with the result that thenceforth all Christians could sleep in their beds unafraid, and even the Savior could come down and walk on the seas, foreigner as He is, without dread of being chased by Christian battleships.

Has the Bible done something still worse than drench the planet

[4] It is not clear to whom Mark Twain was referring here. The reigning Russian monarch was Nicholas II, son of Alexander III.—C. N.

[5] See "King Leopold's Soliloquy," a biting pamphlet by Clemens, reprinted in my *Life As I Find It* [by *Mark Twain,* ed. *Charles Neider.* Hanover House, 1961]. Clemens's figures regarding the reduction of the native population may have been exaggerated, but his case in general was well substantiated.—C. N.

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with innocent blood? To my mind it has—but this is only an opinion, and it may be a mistaken one. There has never been a Protestant boy or a Protestant girl whose mind the Bible has not soiled. No Protestant child ever comes clean from association with the Bible. This association cannot be prevented. Sometimes the parents try to prevent it by not allowing the children to have access to the Bible's awful obscenities, but this only whets the child's desire to taste that forbidden fruit, and it does taste it—seeks it out secretly and devours it with a strong and grateful appetite. The Bible does its baleful work in the propagation of vice among children, and vicious and unclean ideas, daily and constantly, in every Protestant family in Christendom. It does more of this deadly work than all the other unclean books in Christendom put together; and not only more, but a thousandfold more. It is easy to protect the young from those other books, and they are protected from them. But they have no protection against the deadly Bible.

Is it doubted that the young people hunt out the forbidden passages privately and study them with pleasure? If my reader were here present—let him be of either sex or any age, between ten and ninety—I would make him answer this question himself—and he could answer it in only one way. He would be obliged to say that by his own knowledge and experience of the days of his early youth he knows positively that the Bible defiles all Protestant children, without a single exception.

Do I think the Christian religion is here to stay? Why should I think so? There had been a thousand religions before it was born. They are all dead. There had been millions of gods before ours was invented. Swarms of them are dead and forgotten long ago. Ours is by long odds the worst God that the ingenuity of man has begotten from his insane imagination—and shall He and His Christianity be immortal against the great array of probabilities furnished by the theological history of the past? No. I think that Christianity and its God must follow the rule. They must pass on in their turn and make room for another God and a stupider religion. Or perhaps a better than this? No. That is not likely. History shows that in the matter of religions we progress backward and not the other way. No matter, there will be a new God and a new religion. They will be introduced to popularity and accepted with the only arguments that have ever persuaded any people in this earth to adopt Christianity, or any other religion

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that they were not born to: the Bible, the sword, the torch and the axe—the only missionaries that have ever scored a single victory since gods and religions began in the world. After the new God and the new religion have become established in the usual proportions—one-fifth of the world's population ostensible adherents, the four-fifths pagan missionary field, with the missionary scratching its continental back complacently and inefficiently—will the new converts believe in them? Certainly they will. They have always believed in the million gods and religions that have been stuffed down their midriffs. There isn't anything so grotesque or so incredible that the average human being can't believe it. At this very day there are thousands upon thousands of Americans of average intelligence who fully believe in "Science and Health," although they can't understand a line of it, and who also worship the sordid and ignorant old purloiner of that gospel—Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy, whom they do absolutely believe to be a member by adoption of the Holy Family and on the way to push the Savior to third place and assume occupancy of His present place and continue that occupancy during the rest of eternity.

Four

Saturday, June 23, 1906

Let us now consider the real God, the genuine God, the great God, the sublime and supreme God, the authentic Creator of the *real* universe, whose remotenesses are visited by comets only—comets unto which incredibly distant Neptune is merely an outpost, a Sandy Hook to homeward-bound spectres of the deeps of space that have not glimpsed it before for generations—a universe not made with hands and suited to an astronomical nursery, but spread abroad through the illimitable reaches of space by the fiat of the real God just mentioned; that God of unthinkable grandeur and majesty, by comparison with whom all the other gods whose myriads infest the feeble imaginations of men are as a swarm of gnats scattered and lost in the infinitudes of the empty sky.

When we think of such a God as this we cannot associate with Him anything trivial, anything lacking dignity, anything lacking grandeur. We cannot conceive of His passing by Sirius to choose

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our potato for a footstool. We cannot conceive of His interesting Himself in the affairs of the microscopic human race and enjoying its Sunday flatteries and experiencing pangs of jealousy when the flatteries grow lax or fail, any more than we can conceive of the Emperor of China being interested in a bottle of microbes and pathetically anxious to stand well with them and harvest their impertinent compliments. If we could conceive of the Emperor of China taking an intemperate interest in his bottle of microbes we should have to draw the line there; we could not by any stretch of imagination conceive of his selecting from these innumerable millions a quarter of a thimbleful of Jew microbes—the least attractive of the whole swarm—and making pets of them and nominating them as his chosen germs and carrying his infatuation for *them so far as to resolve to keep and coddle them alone and damn* all the rest.

When we examine the myriad wonders and glories and charms and perfections of this infinite universe (as we know the universe now), and perceive that there is not a detail of it—from the blade of grass to the giant trees of California, nor from the obscure mountain rivulet to the measureless ocean; nor from the ebb and flow of the tides to the stately motions of the planets—that is not the slave of a system of exact and inflexible law, we seem to know —not suppose nor conjecture, but *know*—that the God that brought this stupendous fabric into being with a flash of thought and framed its laws with another flash of thought is endowed with limitless power. We seem to know that whatever thing He wishes to do, He can do that thing without anybody's assistance. We also seem to know that when He flashed the universe into being He foresaw everything that would happen in it from that moment until the end of time.

Do we also know that He is a moral being, according to our standard of morals? No. If we know anything at all about it we know that He is destitute of morals—at least of the human pattern. Do we know that He is just, charitable, kindly, gentle, merciful, compassionate? No. There is no evidence that He is any of these things—whereas each and every day as it passes furnishes us a thousand volumes of evidence, and indeed proof, that He possesses none of these qualities.

When we pray, when we beg, when we implore, does He listen?

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Does He answer? There is not a single authentic instance of it in human history. Does He silently refuse to listen—refuse to answer? There is nothing resembling proof that He has ever done anything else. From the beginning of time priests, who have imagined themselves to be His appointed and salaried servants, have gathered together their full numerical strength and simultaneously prayed for rain and never once got it when it was not due according to the eternal laws of Nature. Whenever they got it, if they had had a competent Weather Bureau they could have saved themselves the trouble of praying for that rain, because the Bureau could have told them it was coming anyhow within twenty-four hours, whether they prayed or saved their sacred wind.

From the beginning of time whenever a king has lain dangerously ill the priesthood and some part of the nation have prayed in unison that the king be spared to his grieving and anxious people (in case they were grieving and anxious, which was not usually the rule) and in no instance was their prayer ever answered. When Mr. Garfield lay near to death, the physicians and surgeons knew that nothing could save him, yet at an appointed signal all the pulpits in the United States broke forth with one simultaneous and supplicating appeal for the President's restoration to health. They did this with the same old innocent confidence with which the primeval savage had prayed to his imaginary devils to spare his perishing chief—for that day will never come when facts and experience can teach a pulpit anything useful. Of course the President died just the same.

Great Britain has a population of forty-one millions. She has eighty thousand pulpits. The Boer population was a hundred and fifty thousand, with a battery of two hundred and ten pulpits. In the beginning of the Boer war, at a signal from the Primate of all England the eighty thousand English pulpits thundered forth a titanic simultaneous supplication to their God to give the embattled English in South Africa the victory. The little Boer battery of two hundred and ten guns replied with a simultaneous supplication to the same God to give the Boers the victory. If the eighty thousand English clergy had left their prayers unshed and gone to the field they would have got it—whereas the victory went the other way and the English forces suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Boers. The English pulpit kept discreetly quiet about

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the result of its effort, but the indiscreet Boer pulpit proclaimed with a loud and exultant voice that it was *its* prayers that had conferred the victory upon the Boers.

The British Government had more confidence in soldiers than in prayer—therefore instead of doubling and trebling the numerical strength of the clergy it doubled and trebled the strength of its forces in the field. Then the thing happened that always happens —the English whipped the fight, a rather plain indication that the Lord had not listened to either side and was as indifferent as to who should win as He had always been, from the day that He was evolved down to the present time—there being no instance on record where He has shown any interest at all in any human squabble, nor whether the good cause won out or lost.

Has this experience taught the pulpit anything? It has not. When the Boer prayers achieved victory—as the Boers believed—the Boers were confirmed once more in their trust in the power of prayer. When a crushing finality of defeat overwhelmed them later in the face of their confident supplications, their attitude was not altered, nor their confidence in the righteousness and intelligence of God impaired.

Often we see a mother who has been despoiled little by little of everything she held dear in life but a sole remaining dying child; we have seen her, I say, kneeling by its bed and pouring out from a breaking heart beseechings to God for mercy that would get glad and instant answer from any man who had the power to save that child—yet no such prayer has ever moved a God to pity. Has that mother been convinced? Sometimes—but only for a little while. She was merely a human being and like the rest—ready to pray again in the next emergency; ready to believe again that she would be heard.

We know that the real God, the Supreme God, the actual Maker of the universe, made everything that is in it. We know that He made all the creatures, from the microbe and the brontosaur down to man and the monkey, and that He knew what would happen to each and every one of them from the beginning of time to the end of it. In the case of each creature, big or little, He made it an unchanging law that that creature should suffer wanton and unnecessary pains and miseries every day of its life—that by that law these pains and miseries could not be avoided by any diplo-

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macy exercisable by the creature; that its way, from birth to death, should be beset by traps, pitfalls and gins, ingeniously planned and ingeniously concealed; and that by another law every transgression of a law of Nature, either ignorantly or wittingly committed, should in every instance be visited by a punishment ten-thousandfold out of proportion to the transgression. We stand astonished at the all-comprehensive malice which could patiently descend to the contriving of elaborate tortures for the meanest and pitifulest of the countless kinds of creatures that were to inhabit the earth. The spider was so contrived that she would not eat grass but must catch flies and such things and inflict a slow and horrible death upon them, unaware that her turn would come next. The wasp was so contrived that he also would decline grass and stab the spider, not conferring upon her a swift and merciful death, but merely half-paralyzing her, then ramming her down into the wasp den, there to live and suffer for days while the wasp babies should chew her legs off at their leisure. In turn, there was a murderer provided for the wasp, and another murderer for the wasp's murderer, and so on throughout the whole scheme of living creatures in the earth. There isn't one of them that was not designed and appointed to inflict misery and murder on some fellow creature and suffer the same in turn from some other murderous fellow creature. In flying into the web the fly is merely guilty of an indiscretion—not a breach of any law—yet the fly's punishment is ten-thousandfold out of proportion to that little indiscretion.

The ten-thousandfold law of punishment is rigorously enforced against every creature, man included. The debt, whether made innocently or guiltily, is promptly collected by Nature—and in this world, without waiting for the ten-billionfold additional penalty appointed—in the case of man—for collection in the next.

This system of atrocious punishments for somethings and nothings begins upon the helpless baby on its first day in the world and never ceases until its last one. Is there a father who would persecute his baby with unearned colics and the unearned miseries of teething, and follow these with mumps, measles, scarlet-fever and the hundred other persecutions appointed for the unoffending creature? And then follow these, from youth to the grave, with a multitude of ten-thousandfold punishments for laws broken either

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by intention or indiscretion? With a fine sarcasm we ennoble God with the title of Father—yet we know quite well that we should hang His style of father wherever we might catch him.

The pulpit's explanation of and apology for these crimes, is pathetically destitute of ingenuity. It says that they are committed for the benefit of the sufferer. They are to discipline him, purify him, elevate him, train him for the society of the Deity and the angels—send him up sanctified with cancers, tumors, smallpox and the rest of the educational plant; whereas the pulpit knows that it is stultifying itself, if it knows anything at all. It knows that if this kind of discipline is wise and salutary, we are insane not to adopt it ourselves and apply it to our children.

Does the pulpit really believe that we can improve a purifying and elevating breed of culture invented by the Almighty? It seems to me that if the pulpit honestly believed what it is preaching in this regard it would recommend every father to imitate the Almighty's methods.

When the pulpit has succeeded in persuading its congregation that this system has been really wisely and mercifully contrived by the Almighty to discipline and purify and elevate His children whom He so loves, the pulpit judiciously closes its mouth. It doesn't venture further and explain why these same crimes and cruelties are inflicted upon the higher animals—the alligators, the tigers and the rest. It even proclaims that the beasts perish—meaning that their sorrowful life begins and ends here; that they go no further; that there is no Heaven for them; that neither God nor the angels nor the redeemed desire their society on the other side. It puts the pulpit in a comical situation, because in spite of all its ingenuities of explanation and apology it convicts its God of being a wanton and pitiless tyrant in the case of the unoffending beasts. At any rate, and beyond cavil or argument, by its silence it condemns Him irrevocably as a malignant master, after having persuaded the congregation that He is constructed entirely out of compassion, righteousness and all-pervading love. The pulpit doesn't know how to reconcile these grotesque contradictions and it doesn't try.

In His destitution of one and all of the qualities which could grace a God and invite respect for Him and reverence and worship, the real God, the genuine God, the Maker of the mighty universe

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is just like all the other gods in the list. He proves every day that He takes no interest in man, nor in the other animals, further than to torture them, slay them and get out of this pastime such entertainment as it may afford—and do what He can not to get weary of the eternal and changeless monotony of it.

Five

Monday, June 25, 1906

It is to these celestial bandits that the naïve and confiding and illogical human rabbit looks for a Heaven of eternal bliss, which is to be his reward for patiently enduring the want and sufferings inflicted upon him here below—unearned sufferings covering terms of two or three years in some cases; five or ten years in others; thirty, forty or fifty in others; sixty, seventy, eighty in others. As usual, where the Deity is Judge the rewards are vastly out of proportion to the sufferings—and there is no system about the matter anyhow. You do not get any more Heaven for suffering eighty years than you get if you die of the measles at three.

There is no evidence that there is to be a Heaven hereafter. If we should find, somewhere, an ancient book in which a dozen unknown men professed to tell all about a blooming and beautiful tropical Paradise secreted in an inaccessible valley in the center of the eternal icebergs which constitute the Antarctic continent—not claiming that they had seen it themselves, but had acquired an intimate knowledge of it through a revelation from God—no Geographical Society in the earth would take any stock in that book; yet that book would be quite as authentic, quite as trustworthy, quite as valuable, evidence as is the Bible. The Bible is just like it. Its Heaven exists solely upon hearsay evidence—evidence furnished by unknown persons; persons who did not prove that they had ever been there.

If Christ had really been God He could have proved it, since nothing is impossible with God. He could have proved it to every individual of His own time and of our time and of all future time. When God wants to prove that the sun and the moon may be depended upon to do their appointed work every day and every

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night He has no difficulty about it. When He wants to prove that man may depend upon finding the constellations in their places every night—although they vanish and seem lost to us every day—He has no difficulty about it. When He wants to prove that the seasons may be depended upon to come and go according to a fixed law, year after year, He has no difficulty about it. Apparently He has desired to prove to us beyond cavil or doubt many millions of things, and He has had no difficulty about proving them all. It is only when He apparently wants to prove a future life to us that His invention fails and He comes up against a problem which is beyond the reach of His alleged omnipotence. With a message to deliver to men which is of infinitely more importance than all those other messages put together, which He has delivered without difficulty, He can think of no better medium than the poorest of all contrivances—a book. A book written in two languages—to convey a message to a thousand nations—which in the course of the dragging centuries and eons must change and change and become finally wholly unintelligible. And even if they remained fixed, like a dead language, it would never be possible to translate the message with perfect clearness into any one of the thousand tongues, at any time.

According to the hearsay evidence the character of every conspicuous god is made up of love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, sorrow for all suffering and desire to extinguish it. Opposed to this beautiful character—built wholly upon valueless hearsay evidence—it is the absolutely authentic evidence furnished us every day in the year, and verifiable by our eyes and our other senses, that the real character of these gods is destitute of love, mercy, compassion, justice and other gentle and excellent qualities, and is made up of all imaginable cruelties, persecutions and injustices. The hearsay character rests upon evidence only—exceedingly doubtful evidence. The real character rests upon proof—proof unassailable.

Is it logical to expect of gods, whose unceasing and unchanging pastime is the malignant persecution of innocent men and animals, that they are going to provide an eternity of bliss, presently, for these very same creatures? If King Leopold II, the Butcher, should proclaim that out of each hundred innocent and unoffending Congo negroes he is going to save one from humilation, starvation and assassination, and fetch that one home to Belgium to live with him in his palace and feed at his table, how many people would

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believe it? Everybody would say "A person's character is a permanent thing. This act would not be in accordance with that butcher's character. Leopold's character is established beyond possibility of change and it could never occur to him to do this kindly thing."

Leopold's character *is* established. The character of the conspicuous gods is also established. It is distinctly illogical to suppose that either Leopold of Belgium or the Heavenly Leopolds are ever going to think of inviting any fraction of their victims to the royal table and the comforts and conveniences of the regal palace.

According to hearsay evidence the conspicuous gods make a pet of one victim in a hundred—select him arbitrarily, without regard to whether he's any better than the other ninety-nine or not—but damn the ninety-nine through all eternity without examining into their case. But for one slight defect this would be logical and would properly reflect the known character of the gods—that defect is the gratuitous and unplausible suggestion that one in a hundred is permitted to pull through. It is not likely that there will be a Heaven hereafter. It is exceedingly likely that there will be a Hell —and it is nearly dead certain that nobody is going to escape it.

As to the human race. There are many pretty and winning things about the human race. It is perhaps the poorest of all the inventions of all the gods but it has never suspected it once. There is nothing prettier than its naïve and complacent appreciation of itself. It comes out frankly and proclaims without bashfulness or any sign of a blush that it is the noblest work of God. It has had a billion opportunities to know better, but all signs fail with this ass. I could say harsh things about it but I cannot bring myself to do it—it is like hitting a child.

Man is not to blame for what he is. He didn't make himself. He has no control over himself. All the control is vested in his temperament—which he did not create—and in the circumstances which hedge him round from the cradle to the grave and which he did not devise and cannot change by any act of his will, for the reason that he has no will. He is as purely a piece of automatic mechanism as is a watch, and can no more dictate or influence his actions than can the watch.[6] He is a subject for pity, not blame—and not con-

[6] See "What Is Man?" for a more explicit statement of his belief in determinism. Elsewhere I have written: "It is interesting to speculate how he would have reacted to twentieth-century science, in which the principle of indeterminacy of quantum physics has lent support to the doctrine of free will, the opposite of his favorite doctrine. This principle asserts that the behavior of particles within the atom is not determinable except in terms of broad statistics and probability."—C. N.

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tempt. He is flung head over heels into this world without ever a chance to decline, and straightway he conceives and accepts the notion that he is in some mysterious way under obligations to the unknown Power that inflicted this outrage upon him—and thenceforth he considers himself responsible to that Power for every act of his life, and punishable for such of his acts as do not meet with the approval of that Power—yet that same man would argue quite differently if a human tyrant should capture him and put chains upon him of any kind and require obedience; that the tyrant had no right to do that; that the tyrant had no right to put commands upon him of any kind and require obedience; that the tyrant had no right to compel him to commit murder and then put the responsibility for the murder upon him. Man constantly makes a most strange distinction between man and his Maker in the matter of morals. He requires of his fellow man obedience to a very creditable code of morals but he observes without shame or disapproval his God's utter destitution of morals.

God ingeniously contrived man in such a way that he could not escape obedience to the laws of his passions, his appetites and his various unpleasant and undesirable qualities. God has so contrived him that all his goings out and comings in are beset by traps which he cannot possibly avoid and which compel him to commit what are called sins—and then God punishes him for doing these very things which from the beginning of time He had always intended that he should do. Man is a machine and God made it—without invitation from any one. Whoever makes a machine here below is responsible for that machine's performance. No one would think of such a thing as trying to put the responsibility upon the machine itself. We all know perfectly well—though we all conceal it, just as I am doing, until I shall be dead and out of reach of public opinion—we all know, I say, that God, and God alone, is responsible for every act and word of a human being's life between cradle and grave. We know it perfectly well. In our secret hearts we haven't the slightest doubt of it. In our secret hearts we have no hesitation in proclaiming as an unthinking fool anybody who thinks he believes that he is by any possibility capable of committing a sin against God—or who thinks he thinks he is under obligations to God and owes Him thanks, reverence and worship.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

A Letter from the Argolid

The land of Palamedes; a many-fingered man
Who invented the calendar, lighthouses, dice, backgammon
And a lot else . . .
Or brought them from Egypt, or out of Crete maybe,
  Like my landlord's family, skirting north from the Turks
    Into the hands of the Turks.

Palamedes' hand . . .
With a long net, they quietly wary the fish
Till a little, close one hooks them.
Slow as the sea, in its blue valleys, veers it,
They thread the net along the street, to stitch it.
The egg-yellow nets they tend in front of the houses,
    Or like washing on lines by the shore.
But only a man can needle a net: women
      Quietly
Unravel the yarn from the distaff.

    Skeining, the spool grows.
    Nothing hurries in the sun.

From the little concrete mole,
The island shepherd, unravelling his wool from the ship,
    Skeins it up the hill.
Aloft on the rocky thornside
At evening, the goat-woman, bundled in reddening grey,
    Raises her distaff in
    Her labour like sleeping where
    The twin arms woodenly bless the village.

Now, in the main of summer's
Dry drench from the sun,
The rock bleaches, blanches, sparkles.
    Jewelled weather; and

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The hillside seeds; brown whorl and horn,
Shuck, husk and rasp, spiral and radial in
An orchestra of sharpness.
The chaff is armoured; an insured ripening.
Twenty-three kinds of thistle. Yet
The goats find a living.

Between hill and island
The purple urchin-spines flag
If the wave recedes:
But erect, the next one.

On the wet rock, Uncle Mimis,
With black curls, no chin,
And feet pregnant with years of barefoot walking,
Slowly
Slaps an octopus.
Slop.
Slap.
Flesh for the pot.
In the sun, unhurried, it softens.
Sleepy work.

A jewelled period.
Water tucketing with light
Where little fishes spurt in double shoal,
Twinned in the sea, and black on the sea bed.
Lish and shiver.

The fast patrolling hornets
Wave down the wave, and their full drone
Vanishes.

'The wasp looks for sweet, the hornet loves meat . . .'
But I find only thistledown
And the corn-boat's blond chaff

When I swim to the blue water
That soaks its depths into light
Turning, tangled, returned:

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Deep red, or black, that sea-bed.
Darkness at the jewel's heart.

I shall swim to the island.
Among the sulphur cactus on its nape,
Sun-dazed,
The small church and yard, where Greek was taught
In the time of the Turks.
A baked yard, empty.
Flung in the corner, the old bronze font.
Down the cactus-groves, every hair is a thorn,
The finger a cushion.
Soft pulp in the rind, golden.

Sometimes, as I swim, a wind
Flaws down the bay, drizzles the sea into wind;
Behind me, the spreading edge contouring the water.

A sunburned toad of a fisherman
Overhands his anchor. Shish of the rope on my hip.
Shag-black, very close, the four hooks,
Dripping.
Sudden empty water.

Water.

Why, when I float, do I spin,
Slowly, in a circle on myself,
Like a talking bee?

. . . Turning, turning . . .

Against the blue lissom, the eucalyptus
Buckles and rustles, crowds on itself, becomes
Still
In a silver whisper.

'Notos,' a child on the beach knew.
A cloud shapes and dissolves.
The soar, the tower of the winds

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Till the red doldrum of sundown
Dissolves the rock in light, a windy fire;
And the breeze swings
Onshore to offshore
To cool the evening *corso*

That dissolves, thinning out, in the dark;

The moon, Jupiter, the stars,
On their three separate courses,
Move still: soaring
Over the sleepy house as
The cool hours pass

Into sudden cold at four.
I reach for a grey blanket.
The dream broken. The dead walk.
The gem turns. Lucid darkness.

Lovers, turn; the dawn wind,
That whispers though it cannot speak,
Whispers where you lie twinned.

A little turn, a little word,
See, the world is opening;
Do you let it pass unheard?

But when you turn your head,
Which among you find
Runkled sheet, empty bed?

The pastel volumes of dawn as
The hills open where
The bay ripples a
Grey now and turns
Warm.

And Mistress Condilo, the wife of Costa,
Knits the sinews of her hardwood wrists as
With her slippers asplay on the baseboard,
She rows

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To where the island goats trot for the laboured splash, to be
milked.

In the house and half dark
The children dress to drink.

And the island donkey wails in a trance of despair
And begins sawing wood.

'Grapes, fine grapes I have.'
'Ripe melons, buy.' 'Come, fine figs.'
Pale figs they are, freighted with light; and the grapes
Lit through with ripeness; and red ice of the melon.
Panniers like lamps. The exact step of the donkeys,
And their silverside coats (a dark band on the tail
Crisp as the stripe on a fish)
Catch the morning light, fringe with white
Fire for a moment then
Humble to grey.

'Fine, fine, almonds,' the fisherman chuckled,
Who joined me uninvited
To gather the nuts in my garden.
The Greek Way of Life.
Furry rind, pocked shell, smoky skin: the sweet substance.

Chirm of the goldfinches
Dropping from over the hill
Like a shower of feathery nuts
In a shurr of wings
To the almond trees

Uninvited.

Two donkeys, a motor-bike, a man with a bag
Each morning early. Later, the man with the ice.
Chilly doors of the van. Clang. A cold gust.
'Can we drink the melted ice?' I ask as he saws the block.
A grin. 'Only the flowers.' Lulu: flower-girl.
The chair-mender, sandalless, hornfoot. As he treads,
Softly, the long buff rushes rustle a little.

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The cobbler, collecting the shoes, goes
Also barefoot,
Haunting his minor cry.
A sweating man, with two pink blankets to sell.
And young Giovanni, the ice cream cornet.
An Italian pedals the creamy tricycle
That see-saws its way down the beach.

Costa once, with his rippling sea-blue eyes,
Had a caique, a big white caique, bobbing,
Bobbing on the runkling waves, and the life of a king,
Junketing the sounds and calling at all the islands,
Dipping with fruit and oil, cereal, cloth.
It leisured from cove to cove
As he edged the roadless headland of Eastern Argolis.
A man weathered with weather.
Took the veer of a wind
In the cock of a leaf, shrug of a wave.
A friend of the vague meridian down the bay
Where the breezes salute and diverge.
Notos, Boreas.

After the War, sterling and the dollar made roads;
And the Greek drivers'
'Virtuosité étonnante'
(As Mr. Nagel
Diplomatically
Calls it in his guide-book)
Emptied the bay.
Caique into motor-bike
With a box full of ice, to sell fish
From village to village, through the tawny inland dust.

Between, there is something I do not know:
To captain a big caique,
To have an old bike,
Rich man, poor man
Bezels of the jewel that ride
Half on darkness:

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Blue breeze of the bay,
Wind and water,
White ship, cool water,
A blue day;
The years indulge us.

Islands are friends.
Hours, we ride in the roads.
Cloud shadows.

Heat, dust,
And an old bike, a box of fish.
I and my three friends
Talk and laugh for hours
As we sail down the blue roads.

Years, indulge us.

Above the village stands a bigger house,
That almost has a drily expansive grace;
Extraordinarily suitable for a British HMI
Retired cross-legged to his canvas evening chair
To watch the bay leisurely, leisurely receding
    To the purple end of the spectrum;
And to talk with genial *gravitas*
Of his trade back at home.

High above there again, the first shepherd's house
Lichens into the hill.
The world of sheep.
        Height tells.
Fish, oranges, holidays sink beneath the wave
    Of light
        In the plain.
Within the earth, everywhere, darkness.

The sisters at the *taverna,*
'Fine', 'beautiful', 'wonderful'
They chaffer about the view.
Then slip away to squabble and rant in the yard:

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Antigone one night we have, and the next, *Medea;*
Bright-eyed Adonai, golden-toothed Zafira
Usurp the star parts.

And 'Muddle . . . muddle . . . muddle,' the new waiter grunts,
Jabbing with his fisherman's fingers,
One two three, at the three doors of the ice-box.
True enough—beer, melons, soda
And fish
Cargo in together. I find the scales on the bottles.
Perhaps the caique was the same . . .
For it's all in the family:
The good-looking sister married—
The others quarrel.

And occasionally Brother Gregory
Renders the *Hercules Furens*
Over the boiling
Pots.

Across the tinfoil bay
The ragged crest of Assini
Jags in a line towards upstart Mycenae
And upstart great-walled Tiryns, where now they have
A 'Prison Without Walls'
In the most enlightened style,
And acres of trim oleanders
Effectively irrigated.
Pre-Helladic Assini, where we found
The sea-horse . . . burned to parchment in the sun.
The mane is a bony frill.
My daughter crunched off its nose
And said 'O dear' in Greek.
Her only word.

Silk surface of a day
Skin deep of the jewel
Bezels of the sun.
Years
Indulge us.

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Sleeping outside, the phases of the moon
Become my calendar.
The night peoples, eventful.
Fishing, they row softly.
A watered silk.
The lamp at the prow, a deep gamboge sun,
Mellows the sidling water in
Silence. A silky riding across darkness.

On the hilltop, towards
The ruined Turkish tower,
So holed, gouged, groyned is the rock
As to be the sea's work.

But now it soars, into the dry goldfinches.

. . . Upstart Assini

Years, indulge us . . .

Long, long, long a summer afternoon
Or from flash to flash
When the fish jump
Or the pale-bellied swift,
Fleetest living thing,
Flicking on the turn
Seems for a penny in the second
Like a flying donkey.

Flash of summer
And the wave expiring

Jewel and darkness.

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BEN MADDOW

Two Short Novels

1. Sad Seduction of the Teddy Bear

NOWADAYS, I'm a tool-and-die maker by profession. My work keeps me indoors with big fat goggles clamped to my face, watching the blue jet of my welding torch, or the gush of sparks from the carborundum grinder. All week long, even when I sleep, I smell the oil baking and smoking in the gears of the highspeed lathe, and the sharp odor of steel as it is shaved or gouged; each alloy, to me, with my experience, has its own horrible smell; and I get so I hate the slimy touch, even through my black gloves, of the soup I pour out of an old coffee can to cool the diamond point on the bit.

So on weekends, I've got to pack up and take off. I go hunting in the woods, generally. And I go alone. That way the brown deer up in these hills, and the running pheasant in the huckleberry bushes, are my equals; they beware me, as I beware them. And in the end, why, I may come home with no red meat at all, and my single barrel shotgun not fired once; but my head is clear. It's something Marie will never understand, and as I know that, I've never tried to explain. In fact, I don't know what I would say if I were asked.

Thanksgiving weekend, though, Marie said, "Why not take Jimmie along? He's eleven years old next summer, and has never been out alone with his Dad. It would do him good."

"Why, what's wrong with him?"

Marie said, "Him? Wrong with him? You mean what's wrong with you!"

The end of it was, I and Jimmie took some canned goods and a box of shells for the shotgun, and we drove sixty miles north to good high country near Narraganset Lake, and hired a cabin with two cots and a fireplace. The first afternoon, I was cooking us a meal of red-blooded chili and beans, and looked through the window and saw Jimmie standing at the edge of the ice, testing it delicately with his foot. I hated those two-tone shoes his mother bought him, but they were all he had.

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I went out and showed him how to load the shotgun, the necessary precautions in dealing with dangerous weapons, and all that; but when he touched it, all he said was, "It's too heavy, Papa."

I swung it back to him, "Get it up, get it up," I told him. He shoved it against his shoulder, the way he'd seen it done on T.V.

"Go on, fire!"

"At what?"

"Well, hit that tree!"

"I can't."

"You can't pull a trigger? Don't tell me you can't pull a little soft-working trigger! Just don't tell me that!"

He fired at last; it missed the tree by a mile; but it knocked him back onto muddy ground, and skinned open the seam of his jacket at the elbow, and made him cry real live tears for five minutes. I slapped him around but couldn't stop him.

Well, I did what he wanted, as usual, and went to the store at the Junction, and hired him a pair of ice-skates for the week-end. I was going to teach him how to skate, anyhow, remembering those wonderful, free, quiet, magical winters, when my father was generally in some sanitorium or other, recovering from a binge; and my mother's house; and her big garden, half black and half frost; and the marble mirror of the pond in the back pasture.

But I was cheated of that, too: Jimmie already knew how to skate. Marie had taught him, I guess, and taught him well; too well, in fact. He was as fast as a swallow in a barn; he dipped and returned, keeping his small knees bent and his balance well forward. He had all the thin, stretched, wiry muscles I had at a similar age; oh, he was my boy, nerve, blood, and bone. But his soul, I suppose, was his mother's.

He was doing figure 8's now, so beautifully, so carelessly; and yet, watching him, I felt some kind of faraway horror, though I could not in any way understand why. It wasn't the trick itself, but the way he did it. He'd sweep around the S with a lift of both hands, spin through the short end of the curve, and the long reverse of the S, and all with such perfection; and then his pale eyelashes, longer than any boy's I ever saw, were lightly salted with crystal blown all day from the patches of dry snow among the weeds as stiff as rust-colored iron wire. I made him stop; said he was getting hot, and the sun was almost down. He never argued with me; he

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was always quiet, agreeable, faintly smiling, with his eyes elongated as a woman's; as my dead mother's in fact. It made my heart stop in panic, and stop again, until I could bring myself under control.

"Are you going to shave, Dad?" Jimmie asked, raising his mitten to my cheek.

"I'm growing a beard," I told him.

"I like beards," he told me. He seemed to be tired, glowing, and happy.

For supper, I heated corn-beef hash in a fry pan, and we had it with biscuits and strawberry jam and a perfect egg sizzling on the top, with strong coffee for both of us, because we were men in the wilderness together. He fell asleep, as always, with a long, easy sigh of happiness. I turned out the lights and sat by the fire; my hands grew slowly pink and dry after the supper dishes; they were once long and tapering like Jimmie's, but long days with pick-and-shovel, and the year in the open bituminous pit down in Tennessee, and then this work with steel, and steel alloys, had broadened and toughened them; they were almost oblivious now, to heat or to cold; they were my tools; and there was a pad on each one like the callus on a foot; and the nails were cracked and tough and generally bluish or blackened, like five miniature horns on each hand. Jimmie'll have the same, I believe, if a father counts for anything at all.

Jimmie said, "Mama?" in his sleep, and then added, "I want my gun—." The rest of what he said was not understandable. I went and got another quilt from the closet back of the fireplace, and was putting it around him, very gently, when I noticed the teddy bear next to his chest. I dragged it out at once.

Holding it by one arm, I stood in the middle of the firelit cabin; I was sick at heart. Its mild, black, glass-button eyes held a separate fire reflecting from the fireplace, bright as glass fruit. Jimmie turned on his side; his empty hand sought his own cheek. I tore the bear's arms and legs out of their wired sockets and thrust them way back on the fire. Straw came out of the neck, and burned like tiny firecrackers.

I went to bed with three good mouthfuls of whiskey. I imagined I saw the glass eyes drop off and melt into the heat. God damn it, God damn it! And yet it was I who bought that teddy bear for him, $5.95 I think it cost, when he was sick of whooping cough at

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nine months old, and pretty near died. The thought hit me, then: maybe the teddy bear was his mascot, his good-luck piece, like a man will keep an Indian-head penny in the back pocket of his overalls, and know it's all nonsense, but he's never had a serious accident since the January morning that he found it melting a long hole in the smoky snow, where the sun had heated the copper; so maybe my son would hurt himself without it, and sicken, or die. It's been known to happen.

I got up barefoot, on the ice-cold, dusty floor, and pried the dead ashes apart; too late; all I found was the clockwork of the little music box inside the teddy bear's belly, partly warped, of course, where I had thrown the animal, hard, against the rear of the fireplace. It used to play "The Farmer in the Dell." Well, when I saw it, I knew my boy would weep his heart out, and I'd be the only villain in sight. It had to be lost. I lifted out the scorched music box, and wrapped it in a piece of newspaper, carefully, not to awaken Jimmie with the rattling, and dressed and took my single-barreled shotgun, and walked away from the cabin as fast as I could.

There was no sun up yet, just a bar of cherry-red, like an ingot on the rollers, but bent all around the east, over low hills and black stands of Douglas fir. Where I walked, there'd been maples and oaks, and my boots trod on the autumn leaves, as if upon layer upon layer of the finest, moist, parti-colored leather. I was almost running, by now, and entirely out of breath, and so I stopped, and threw away the musical skeleton of the teddy bear by unwrapping and flinging it out of the newspaper at the same time. The strangest thing was this: where it fell, rolling into a hollow between two hump-backed roots, there was a skull near by, and some bones of a gigantic spine. No doubt some poor horse had been hauled out here, dead, or half-dead, who knows how long ago?

"That's me, twenty or thirty years from now," I said aloud. My own weakness made me furious with myself. I slung the shotgun on my back and began to walk home to the cabin. I saw my own boy's image in myself; I was more like him than I thought: self-talker, self-pitier. Well, no more of that!

On my left, there was a corner of fence, not even barbed wire, but lengths of split pine, nailed to crazy, irregular posts, and when I had walked along it about three or four hundred yards, I saw,

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hung high on the topmost rail, a woman's torn summer blouse, with all the buttons rotted out of it. It made me laugh; I took off my mittens, and felt the fabric: cheap rayon no doubt; but it had a woman's feel. Out beyond, I could see morning smoke rise out of an unseen house.

I crossed the fence and climbed the slope of a pasture, full of dead hummocks and frozen cowpies, till I rose high enough to see the farmhouse itself. It was quite old, partly grey and partly white; the porch round its three sides was sloped in three separate directions, like hills. The rising sun glittered off the windows, all of them broken and pasted together with strips of wrapping paper; and on the porch, wearing a red, misbuttoned man's sweater, was a woman of twenty or so, sweeping dirt from the inner hall and over the open porch and down the steps into the frozen mud.

I came up and said, "How do." I had a red plaid scarf tied round my neck, and I slowly pulled it off. It was a good yard long.

She watched me, smiling gently. She wasn't bad-looking; her face was remarkably younger than the rest of her body.

I said to her, "I don't mean to trouble you, but didn't you lose this pretty scarf?"

She said, "Not me. I got nothing like that. I wish I had."

"I wonder whose it is, then?" I said, looking idly around.

After a couple of minutes, she said, "I think maybe it was a summer boarder down to the Lake."

"It could be," I said. "I found it high up on a fence," I said. "High as she could reach at the time anyway," I said. That remark made the girl laugh aloud, leaning back from her broom; I saw she had lost many, perhaps most of her front teeth.

A light went on somewhere in the kitchen, I should judge. "Anybody here but us chickens?" I asked her.

She twisted her long neck around. "Nobody, that is, but old Auntie Grandma." Then she added, "She's down on men pretty bad. Or so she says."

"Where's your father?"

"Oh, him! Poor man. He broke some little thing in his back, chopping wood while he was drunk, been in the back bedroom, except for needfuls, for almost two years."

"So you bear the burden," I told her.

"Oh, Mama and me. She's out hunting Brunswick stew. There's lots of squirrel on that very tree, but she hates to kill them that

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close to the house." The girl laughed again. I saw a man's white, shaved face at the window, raising, then lowering himself. I called out to him, "How do, sir!"

"He don't visit too much," said the girl.

The door opened about two inches. An old woman's face, ferocious, with round blue eyes, stared out at me; then shut the door as secretly as it opened.

"Aren't you cold?" I said to the girl, and fingered the red scarf.

The girl said, "Getting warmed up, sweeping this old crackety porch twice a day. Auntie Grandma, she's a bear for God's cleanliness. Well, it's no work to her, so long as I do it, I suppose."

"Aren't you married?" I said, after a long pause.

"Yes, indeed I am."

"*When do you three women get down off the porch and farm* this land?"

"I don't know about farm," said the girl. "But we eat off it, now and again."

"Where's your man?"

"He up and run, Christmas-time six years ago. Men are a scared race, you know that." She said it as a plain fact, looking me straight in the eye.

"Some are and some aren't," I replied. Whereupon I put my long plaid scarf on the porch rail. "Would you like to have this as a present?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the girl.

"You could use it," I told her, "weather like this."

"Mama would kill me, I know she would."

"Well, try it on for size, maybe it won't fit."

Smiling, she came up and seized the scarf with both hands, and flung it out to its full length, and drew it around her waist, not her neck, and twisted it so it would hold. Then she pulled off the man's sweater, hung it upon a nail. Underneath, she had on a home-made dress, cut sleeveless and straight, out of a bolt of cloth with printed flowers on it, and a hole for the neck. It had been sewn down the sides, and that's about all.

"Pretty," I told her. "Damn pretty."

"You're a strong man yourself," she said to me frankly, "which is a lot better than being pretty, I think."

There was quite a long silence. She rested against the old, white-washed pillar of the porch, smiling and wiping her mouth. Then, in

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a slow gesture, she lifted her right hand, high across her forehead, so that her white underarm caressed her loose hair in front, and another patch of hair, rising as thick as grass, lay open under her right armpit, as she leaned, curving, on her languorous left side against the porch pillar.

"What would you want to swap for this piece of goods?" she asked me.

"What have you got I could use?"

"I got a good hunting dog, Mama has it with her, but it's mine by rights."

I said, "I'd rather have a good hunting kitty-cat anytime."

She leaned down, and felt of the scarf, twisting and untwisting it. The fringes hung down, front and back. "What time is any time?" she said finally.

"Right now," I told her.

"Well, well!" she said. Then she said again, "Well, mister. You make it hard to say no." Then she looked down into my grim, square, unshaven face, and laughed with pleasure. It was to say, "Now, mister, I've got the whip over you, haven't I?"

Instead, though, she said, "Here's my Mama. Coming out of the woods. Why don't you bargain it out with her?"

I half-turned my head. A big woman in a man's Navy pea jacket, and long boots, with a cap on her head, the earflaps drawn down, and coming heavily out of the wooded lot to the west. She carried a rifle on her shoulder, of Civil War manufacture, to judge by its great length; and hanging in a row from the iron barrel were six squirrels, slung head-down, with drops of bright blood on their thick, fresh winter fur.

The girl's mother came up to me; and with the same round blue eyes as the grandmother, except with thick folds at the outer edge, a touch of Indian blood, kept them fixed on me; she examined me head to foot, as if with the point of a long-used, honed-thin kitchen knife. The woman said, at last, and her voice had a husky tone, perfectly at ease, and perfectly self-confident, "Mister, I think you been round here just about long enough. I'll thank you to get off my property."

I scratched my whiskers, said nothing, as there was nothing to say, and walked off. I didn't take the scarf back; women are naturally slow, no matter what they say.

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I was coming through the woods again, where the skull of the old horse gnawed the ground with one jaw, when a light step ran after me, and touched me. I swung around. It was the girl again, with my scarf draped around her shoulders now, and flowing out behind her as she ran.

"Looks pretty any way you wear it," I said.

"You want it back right now?" she asked.

I said, "No." Then I waited the necessary time and said to her, putting my hand on the fringe, "After a while will do just as well."

She said, "We got this old ice-house, full of sawdust is all it is, right now, but soft as a bed."

I thought this over for a moment. "Never mind that," I told her. "I got a bed in a nice rented cabin with a fire."

"Told me that before, you could have kept this old scarf, or shirt, or whatever," and then, with her toothless mouth, she laughed.

I didn't tell her about Jimmie. There would be time enough for that when we got to it. Worst come to worst, I'd give her a dollar or two in cash.

2. On the Square

TELL THE TRUTH, it was more triangular, because quite a long time ago, in the mid-thirties, fearing that any collection of more than 25 persons in one place might lead straight to Red Revolution, the City Fathers had cut Warren G. Harding Square into separate levels and terraces, divided by walks, steps, fences, sandboxes, and colored fountains. It also had numerous palm trees, an open-air roller skating rink, two bowling lawns for Senior Citizens, and seven or eight hamburger-hot-dog-and-coke stands, which were worth your life to patronize, partly because of the cooking, but mainly because of a swarm of man-eating yellow-jack wasps that had become immune to everything, including free copies of the Holy Book with every donation.

Preaching the Gospel, I might mention, is just a stopgap for

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me till business conditions improve. I am actually trained as a used car salesman, patio screen specialist, typewriter repair man, independent retail mineral water concessionaire, and in fact, in my younger days I actually ran a schlag store, which is a four-wall circus where anything goes, for example, colored paper pads sold three for 25 cents, which you could get anywhere else for a nickel.

But the hell with the glorious past. The fact is, today I had hit a rock-bottom streak of misfortune, to where I was preaching the Gospel and passing the Hat, in one corner of this nice free public park. I set up my stand and my flag and my stack of free Bibles, right on the northeast corner where the City Hall happens to be opposite. It was threatening to rain at the time, so I was giving my little inspirational talk at a speed which would have won the grand prix for motorcycles at the shindig held annually every Spring in sunny Catalina.

My opener, when I had climbed to the top of the little wooden stand, and had put my hand affectionately on the staff of the American flag, went pretty much as follows: "SMOG, DROUGHT, PLAGUE AND BODILY RHEUMATISM!" You say that at the top of your voice and it catches the attention of people at once. I believe, trade-secret, it's the rheumatism that does it. Almost immediately there were twenty or twenty-five customers gathered around, some of them with ear-plugs, and all of them waiting to see the free show. I paused for effect, which was an error. It's like a tavern where they feature Western music; if the band stops for one minute, they walk out and start necking in the 25 cent parking lot.

So as I paused, looking around from citizen to citizen, a man down on my left said in fanatical voice, "The Devil don't keep union hours, the Devil tempts with God's own flowers!" This poetic jerk must have been quite short, because I couldn't see him; there was a large lady with white hair smiling in front of him.

More people began to push in from the edges of the crowd. I had a big audience, but the show wasn't mine.

I said, "Brothers and sisters, if any among you sincerely feel you are closer to God than I am, you are welcome to take over my humble stand." I jumped down dramatically.

This sincere invitation didn't worry the man in the least. He said, raising and lowering his voice with superb dramatic effect, "Which booze you going to choose? Which foe has got to go? The

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devil preachers or the baseball bleachers? The Commie teachers or the double features?"

At this critical point, the large lady turned and shook her finger at the little heckler behind her. I was now able to see him for the first time. He was a blue-eyed, red-headed little man, with a silk lapel badge, which said in blue lettering, DELEGATE, UNITED CHRIST HEALERS, SECOND BROTHERHOOD. She said to him, "Brother, we forgive you." Then she went on, addressing the crowd, "Don't hurt him. He's a Christian. I feel sure he's a Christian."

He said to her, but in a cowed and beaten voice, "How can you hope to go to heaven? If you don't even go to Church?" But the starch was obviously wrung out of him. He couldn't even rhyme any more.

The lady chucked him under the chin and told him to cheer up. She said to him. "Don't despair. I got a prayer handkerchief in my purse, and put my hand to my morning radio if I feel in any way tired or downcast. Don't you? Fellow Christian sufferers!" she cried, getting the spirit, little by little. "Have you ever had the thrill of lying in your bed, way out there in Radio Land? Where if you don't like the ten o'clock service, you can cut him off dead by turning a little knob?" She had the crowd applauding and laughing at her. She was the worst kind of pest: a professional amateur.

I looked at the sky; big, fat, dark clouds were coming up over the City Hall, which is just about where you would expect them to come. I figured there would be a downpour in less than half an hour. I decided to work the personal angle. I called out to her, "Lady, you remind me of my gold-hunting days in the California mountains."

She said, "Tell it, reverend, tell it strong!"

I pointed two forefingers toward her, like guns, and continued as follows: "Lady, in my sinful days, I must have panned every stream and gravel bed from the Sacramento River on up and down to Vancouver, Canada. And I never found anything but trouble."

"Man is foolish!" she shouted, "And I mean men, and not women, and especially I don't mean nothin' in between! Why—" she continued, "I believe they've found them a new way of reproducing 'emselves, otherwise where do they all come from?"

She got a laugh on that one, too. The sky had darkened overhead, and drops of hot rain splattered one by one on the baked and

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yellow grass of Warren G. Harding Square. I was getting desperate.

I opened my jaws as wide as I could, and waggled my tongue around between my teeth. "Look at my mouth!" I cried. I put a pinkie in each corner of my mouth, to hold it open for all to see. I may mention that it's quite a trick to keep talking while your mouth is wide open, but it can be done, and when done properly, you get attention from one and all. I said, more or less distinctly, "Spent four years looking for gold! and all the time!—" I swung around in a full circle, mouth wide open—"I had a mouthful of Dr. Beauchamp's gold fillings right inside me!" I had the crowd back with me now, watching my face, waiting for the lady to make her move. She did, too. The large lady shoved herself through the crowd and climbed straight up onto my wooden stand.

She raised both her dead-white palms to the sky, and cried, "I'm going to preach the truth today, so watch out, God!" she cried. It was a terrific opener; and what made it worse, thunder began to talk behind her, in those clouds dark and shiny, as thick as fish in a net.

"God, stop talking and start listening!" There was a shine on her face, like permanent lightning.

I looked around me; everyone faced the lady, with a smile of anticipation. And I'll tell you something worse: I was watching, too. I couldn't help myself. Me—a spectator, a citizen, a lowly mark! It was one of the most chilling experiences of my life.

She said, looking not at us, but at some blue glory left between rolling and muttering clouds, "You remember living in a house, oh, Lord God? Have you ever done such a thing? Where the shades are drawn down? And there's flowers on the brass doorknob? Tied with a purple ribbon? And what's inside? Why, nothing but your own flesh-and-blood, lying boxed on the dining room table? Lord God Above, why did you open that door to me, and let me walk out alive?" Suddenly she began to laugh; she put both closed, white fists against her head and opened her mouth and laughed. Oh, she had one of the best maneuvers in the trade. And when she'd finished laughing, and you were picking out the pieces of ice in your blood, she began again in a low, conversational voice, "I been pursued by sickness all my life. My entire cousin's family died in a quick disease in western Illinois. Fire, Lord, fire! You say that's the Devil's work? Oh Lord! Is that what you claim. Well, I throw that back in Your Face, Lord God!" She bit her hands and sighed

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and hissed through her bitten fingers. "Now poor little Katherine, poor little catty-kins, poor little daughter, forty years ago they tell me, and oh, it's true! But it's kind of truth that lies! Because I see her boxed in her baby bed! Nor I wouldn't let them bury her, till I had wept and howled a week till Sunday!—Oh, she died of the fiery sickness, Lord Jesus! Or so they tell me, so they say—." Her voice moved down toward a whisper now. She talked through closed eyes, but what she said, she left to us poor souls to imagine.

And suddenly, in that hot, close, darkened afternoon, she shouted out so loud you'd think she had a hidden mike somewhere in her gingham dress, which was running black down the sides with the sweat of her fat body; she cried out, I tell you, the way my hair stuck straight out of my spine. She said, "I disbelieve you, God! I disbelieve you! And I make mock and misery out of Your Kingdom Come!" She raised and pointed one hand at the sky gone as black as a bruise. "You ain't showed me no Grace! No Heaven! No Mercy! No nothin' at all!—Well, I say to You, Lord God Jesus, if you want me to change and shake my disbelief, why, show me the Tip of Your Littlest Finger! Go on, show me! *Show me!* SHOW ME!"

She stopped. There was an echo from the other side of the Square. She let her head sink down and tears roll down into the lines of her fat neck; and she said, in a low and natural voice, as if to the watchers with dirty hats, and to the listeners with matchsticks in their jaws, and to me, good old empty pockets himself, standing dumb and electrified with sheer admiration, "Lord, Lord," she said very softly, "I got to scold You sometime or other, don't I? You'll pardon me for it, I know, I'm just an old lady. Preparing to meet You and argue with You, if you'll give me the chance. Because you suffered three nails on the cross, now why do you make us go through the same identical thing? Why? Why, oh why, oh why? Why is it, Lord Jesus? Why is it, Lamb of God?"

And her voice soft again, too soft, at least to hear. Her lips now moving as if talking to herself alone, she lowered herself back off the stand. She was heavier now, her breasts and belly weighed her down. There was rain spattering on all of us; it was like tears; it tasted salty, I swear; or else she had us all hypnotized.

People reached past each other to touch her dress or squeeze her hand. She smiled; she was all right, she told them, they needn't to worry.

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With the lady gone, the crowd began to fade away. The show was definitely and finally dead. I rolled up the flag, folded the stand, put the free Bibles in all my pockets, and began to walk home. The rain trickled down the part in my hair and off the bridge of my nose. I lived in a rooming house on Orange Boulevard, where you couldn't sleep during daylight at all, because there was a troupe of trained midgets who occupied the room next door, and used to rehearse at all ungodly and midget hours.

Then, at the edge of the park, I saw the lady again, standing all alone in the misery of the rain. She had done her spiel, had her one big one-shot spot, and now it was all over. And I noticed for the first time that she wore broken, grey, cracked men's shoes; and both of them right-footed ones, at that.

And as I watched her in the rain, with a certain nasty satisfaction, maybe, there was that red-headed, blue-eyed man again, with the silk badge on his lapel; he came running across the street toward her, waving a blue-handled umbrella. He gave a little bow of sympathy and handed it to her, wide open.

She stared at him; she yelled, "On your way! On your way, brother!" as if he had made a sexy proposal. But then she took and shut the umbrella, in the very deluge of rain, and using it like a weapon, began to beat this poor delegate over the head and shoulders with it. He shrieked, waved his arms, and retreated under a wooden bandstand. "On your way!" she was left in possession of the umbrella.

Alone, now, in the empty levels of the park, she looked around her, and saw me watching her, from across the boulevard. I waved, she waved back. She opened the umbrella, very slowly, meanwhile nodding, as if anything I had ever done in all my life was now understood and forgiven. Then, quite solemnly, as if she were in a parade, or better yet, as if she were the parade itself, she moved slowly and pompously away. The umbrella had a large patch, poorly sewed, black on black, through which the rain leaked copiously.

You know something interesting? *That lady is now my wife.* No, that's not true. Honestly, it's not! I just said that to get your attention back, I swear!

Why the hell don't people believe each other any more? On the other hand, did you ever think what would happen if they did?

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WILLIAM DICKEY

Slowly Toward the North

In the smooth Negro shadows, under a tree
Shaped like a man and woman making love,
I grew to body. Equatorial colors,
Red and black bandings of the naked snake,
Flowered in my milk. The black root of my belly
Sent rockets out to sip the excited air.

That was within the arms of the round tropics
In a hothouse of children. Under the swelling leaf
The fine hairs of our bodies roused themselves,
Chattered at attention. The world, an endless breast,
Hung with the utmost prodigies of milk,
Juice spattered warmly out of vein and stalk.

I was made partisan of that feral day,
As flexed as the yellow length of a lion curled
Around his own ferocity, hugging it.
My arms were made the tendons of the tree,
My lips leaves, the least murmur of my speech
Invitation to the invasions of the air.

The mimicry of flower becoming beast,
Digesting meat into its own dense blood,
Or of the animals striped like live bamboo—
These melting species, married to one another
Until one voice fell from their swelling mouths,
Sweetened the confusion of my ripening.

This was the jungle of bodies, where I lay
Equally as man or woman, with the red
Male vine, or the penetrable moss.
Faces, lips smiling, took their character
From momentary shadows that entered them,
Indifferent to the name of sun or moon.

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It was the easiest latitude. Only
Because force is uneasy, spending itself upon
What cannot define it, I became discontented.
The fetish figures, their sex exaggerated,
Simple containers for the act of joining,
Were as offensive as a rude child's dolls.

It was time to begin the arctic explorations.
Birds argued against it, their feathers in a fan
Spread out into mingling, interlacing colors.
The coats of animals spoke in their plush voices
Of the depths of feeling; at the edge of hearing
Bats voiced the heat of their multiplying blood.

Each step was through a noose of the lianas
Pretending to be a noose of human women,
Or over volcanoes erupting like human men.
But step by step, up the globe's inward curve,
I grew cooler. It was the wolves' teeth I noticed;
Not the red snarl, but the unemotional white.

There, when a flower grew, it kept itself a flower.
I began naming myself by my advances.
At the Tropic of Cancer I knew I was animal,
Male when the warm currents dived under in the sea,
Human at the first barrier of the welcome ice.
The tides flattened. I knew I was no one else.

Knowing takes time. The expenditure of the body
Goes by degrees, the comfortable fat
No longer sheathes the heart. Organs detach,
Drop off when the concentration on them fails.
In the white plain, an eye on a walking bone
Is the needed term, the self at its minimum.

In the white plain, in color's abolition,
Events turn single, are icily themselves.
The wish to huddle together arrows south
With the close squadrons of departing birds.
A single bear, grown larger and less instinctive,
Heaves his white eyesight over the empty snow.

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The aurora is color seen from the other side,
Pale, having undergone the tunnel of death,
And stating this always to a withered sky
In whose high air the magnetisms burn
With an excitement opposite to the flesh,
A pattern for the mind's discovering medium.

One foot before the other, as men walk
A shelf of ice over a precipice,
One thought after the other, as men think
Syllogisms that involve minute advances,
I went toward winter, the defining time,
The hour of the intelligence's governance.

Slowly toward the north, the uncompromised.
Lips kiss in the south, but there a glacier inches.
The earthquakes of the south pour their hot beat
To the world's core; it echoes in the north
In an adjustment of the logical sea,
A furrow in the exactly balanced tides.

How far had I gone when my speeches broke like knives
And my teeth sharpened against the brittle air?
I was ungendered into theorem,
A man, or a demonstration of a man
Made to a white classroom, attentive, taking notes,
Made to the meticulous question of the snow.

Unoccupied space fades into loss of space.
That white, unspotted by the noise of blood
Was of no size, I was of no size in it.
An atom has the same size as the sun
When all is pattern, when a snowflake mocks
The branched shape of a regular galaxy.

When nothing moves in space, there is no time
But the time of the eye turned inward, clicks
Of a clock telling truth, a body without hands.
I was in time then as in making love,
Always at the center moment, when the heart
Stills itself, and will not yet explode.

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Slowly to absolute north, the intended point
Of philosopher's zero, when the instructions freeze
And all must be done from its ultimate starting-point.
I broke two stars together, and from the ice
Of their catastrophe, created man.
He was myself, but differently understood.

It was the world, but differently understood.
In that white plain I made an attack of green,
And an army of dolphins intelligent in the sun,
Flashing like living circles, head to tail,
Like shapes of conclusions, like eventual returns.
I made the blood, with its insuring song.

Being myself now seen from the other side
I began the round descent. A different south
Stretches below, when you are different,
Having, through isolation, found your name.
After the adventure in the perfect ice
Your voice carries the pain of authority.

I do not say it is the only possible path.
But, in the midst of wives bearing fat children
To animal health, if I am to instruct them
It must be to say, although your bodies are here
Your names are elsewhere. The tiger will not tell you,
Nor are you understood in the red jungle,

But, to be known, must endure the explorations
To the fine edge, fringed with ice, of your least island.
You will come back named by the explicit north
And made by it what understanding makes you.
Do that, if to be clearly what you are
And nothing you are not, is acceptable to you.

And if to watch the sea's larger enjoyment
In being its depth, the land's in being granite,
The species cleaved from each other, codified,
Will content you, when anonymity will not content you,
Make your departure from the entangling flower
That has lived in you like your other flesh,

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Divide the kiss, loose what is intertwined.
By stages of nakedness, hair, hand, belly, bone,
Go slowly toward the north, and when the air
Is death to your voice, ask the convulsive question
And find the other side. And when the sea
Is mirror only, be christened and be baptized.

JOHN FANDEL

Driving Home

On a slow gold afternoon
I saw some goldenrod
growing against the granite
pilings of a bridge
as if supporting the stones—
a flower-suspension bridge—
so steady in the sun,
holding up even the sun—
or doubling, at least, the sun
doubling their own gold.
How could I tell the flowers,
the sun, from one another,
the sun upon the flowers
in the sun on the flowers,
leaning at once together
in gold against the stone,
supporting a granite bridge,
in a world of so much union
of stone and sun and flowers
on a slow gold afternoon?

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OSWALD LE WINTER

Among the Khazars

for Mark Linenthal

Each day the sun comes up,
each day goes down.
Life drifts like sheep to grass,
nights dance by fire like a clown.

The great Khan, thick in skins,
drowses and waits.
Advisers juggle time away.
Only the jester meditates.

But meditates upon the God
a Spanish rabbi makes
wide though invisible, silent
although his strange tongue quakes.

No matter that in Granada sit
young men with insect eyes,
proving the one God by the rule
of that Pythagoras who never lies.

Here the Crimean sun makes
mystics out of wheat.
The harvest moon will not believe
itself the mere reflection of an heat.

In Spain, geometers have caught
the spears of heaven on a shield
that blinds defender and hoarse foe
from seeing the blunt swords they wield.

A simple cunning is enough for war,
a saying runs among the Khazar men.
The jester's ball has gone clear up
and bounced to earth again.

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The rabbi and the jester sit,
the fire watered out.
"A simple cunning," shouts the Khan,
"as foxes stop and sniff in doubt."

Like a Riddle-Potent Knot

Like a riddle-potent knot, the sheet
I thought would cover me
when I began to cool with sweat
during the heat of this midsummer night,
lies tightly wound around my knees,
playing its minute part, gaoler,
in the drama of imaginings and sounds
conspiring to prevent my sleep
by tugging with ominous insistence at my heart.

The chant of crickets in the massive dark;
the battering of insect wings
against the window screen; the grate of autos
on the road below the house; the brunt
of jasmine which invades my room;
all bring my mind no ease, all become
metamorphosed in complexities. I am possessed
by an unrest so rigid it defies what pleasure
I might have from the flashing of some fireflies.

Nothing will give me peace this night
though I had labored all day as I could;
begun a letter owed for weeks,
climbed the hill from which the bay had spread
before me like a blue fan, bit my axe
deep into three dead maples in the wood. Now,
past the crest of night, I see the skimming
blade, the splintered bark, the hill,
each scene precisely incomplete as in a dream.

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What seeks solution now? I ask myself
knowing too well that some immense necessity
sleeps in me while I cannot sleep. Foreboding
over world-crumbling bombs no longer cowers me,
nor do I suffer for the fate of poetry.
The prime events that rob us of our lives
our sole insomnias will not deter.
Dread is a waste before inevitables. Flight
won't flee the doer as the flier can the deed.

If only I imagined fear as in my youth
when I would huddle in a squeezing room
and conjure up the worst; a giant pillow
stifling me, or being swallowed in the jaws
of some whale-boweled calamity; all
the most terrible to trick me into courage
which would never come before exhaustion
and a childish trust had carried me to sleep
as perfect as the danger which inspired me.

But pillows have diminished and my jaws
are tight. The terrors that in childhood
yielded only fright have lost their grandeur,
their ability to make infinitudes of courage
seem attainable. Complexities return with night.
What taunts me now will not be caught
by galloping with dead Nebuchadnezzar's kin.
Their hooves once roused my skin; their manes,
those fanning manes, beckoned, and not in vain.

Over the east the sky grows pearl as the night
defers. Who but the child of that dark world,
summoned by less alterable terrors now, sat here
and stared at ghosts of dreams that lied?
Who shivered, hearing the first sparrow's tweet,
and twisted in his sheet, wishing an ancient sabre
in his hand, still moist from heat, a blade
such as the Macedonian could flourish when
hindered by that riddle only slicing could defeat.

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Joseph Conrad
Before the Nelson Monument

That stone's no steadier than a deck,
your laurel heaves like breakers,
the crowds disperse in tides below your gaze.
Each night the sun descends behind the froth
of London's attics. All your days
fat pigeons roar like cannon on their trek.

Horatio, Horatio, be glad that last day sealed
your memory. No matter in what rooms
you might have lain your gloves, or on what chaise
your full sleeve hung, like every man, death
met at some disordered moment of surprise,
your future with your blood congealed.

Mad England, seeing only what he's told,
sits by the speaker now in slippers and suspenders,
behind each shade. I've lately thought it's time
to lift the megaphone again, spread furled sheets,
change tack, haul anchor out of all this slime.
Instead, I hear my voice grow old.

Each Englishman is done with duty.
He's heard the seas are tamed.
St. James' children sail their paper men o'war
into momentous battles with kneepants Napoleons.
Our poets, sick of nerve, wade out from shore
to find a deeper, warmer, final beauty.

We two have bucked our share of sudden gales.
I stand beside your last command
a debonair old man whose legs are failing.
At least we've had our say, written dispatches,
walked the pitching sea. Tonight my ceiling
may be full of billowing, black, endless sails.

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JAMES DICKEY

Horses and Prisoners

In the war where many men fell
Wind blew in a ring, and was grass.
Many horses fell also to rifles
On a track in the Philippine Islands
And divided their still, wiry meat
To be eaten by prisoners.
I sat at the finish line
At the end of the war

Knowing that I would live.
Long grass went around me, half wind,
Where I rode the rail of the infield
And the dead horses travelled in waves
On past the finishing post.
Dead wind lay down in live grass,
The flowers, pounding like hooves,
Stood up in the sun and were still,

And my mind, like a fence on fire,
Went around those unknown men:
Those who tore from the red, light bones
The intensified meat of hunger
And then lay down open-eyed
In a raw, straining dream of new life.
Joy entered the truth and flowed over
As the wind rose out of the grass

Leaping with red and white flowers:
Joy in the bone-strewn infield
Where clouds of barbed wire contained
Men who ran in a vision of greenness,
Sustained by the death of beasts,
On the tips of the sensitive grass blades,
Each footstep putting forth petals,
Their bones light and strong as the wind.

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From the fence I dropped off and waded
Knee-deep in the billowing homestretch
And picked up the red of one flower.
It beat in my hand like my heart,
Filled with pulse of the air,
And I felt my thighbones yearn
To leap with the trained, racing dead.
When beasts are fallen in wars

For food, men seeking a reason to live
Stand mired in the on-going grass
And sway there, sweating and thinking,
With fire coming out of their brains
Like the thought of food and life
Of prisoners. When death moves close
In the night, I think I can kill it:
Let a man let his mind burn and change him

To one who was prisoner here
As he sings in his sleep in his home,
His mane streaming over the pillows,
The white threads of time
Mixed with the hair of his temples,
His grave-grass risen without him:
Now, in the green of that sleep,
Let him start the trained air of the island

Out of the gate of jute string
That hangs from the battered grandstand
Where hope comes from animal blood
And the hooves of ghosts become flowers
That a captive may run as in Heaven,
Then let him strip off his dead shirt
And, sighing like all saved men,
Take his nude child in his arms.

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SEAN LUCY

Renouncer

"The gay time gone, what shall the may-fly do?"
The question asked turned him into a man.
Also, just at the time it hit him,
He felt a strong revulsion
Against the plush and gin and dumbly-fumbled women

He left,
And saw far-off the lost unconscious city
Dwindle into a heap of sparks the night extinguished.

If he had known, at first, how brain and body
Were fed by her,
Slobbery, cheery, all-embracing mother,
Futile civilization,
He might have thought twice before his self-establishment
In a desolate hermitage famous for rocks and lions.

The journey made, he was of such a disposition
Not even to scorn return or compromise,
But merely to ignore them.
His stubbornness was something like stupidity.

He found the rocks as hard as they had told him,
The lions far more real than he expected:
Yet he accepted them, and made himself
Gradually into the sort of thing he wanted.

He was alone, but in a different way now,
His songs were sudden in the desert hills.

When his old home blew up on the horizon
He hardly raised his eyes;
Only slow birds over the wilderness
Screamed with resentment, flapped with black surprise
At that almighty blinding bright explosion.

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Pine-Wood

The pine-wood stands above the steady tide
Which stands at full under a moon,
The tall man rests on a blue rock
With shadows driven through his side.

The double-dimness of the moon
Shines in his earth-bound eyes,
No melody his fingers knew
Troubles his heart with blame
Or with surprise.

The trees know of no wind,
Their conversations over where he sits
Are all as still as buried bones.
While he is silently regarding night,
Holding a handful of white stones.

Rain and Sickness

Dark wind
Drives the thick rain,
Drives the dim rain into the doorway,
The double tree looks North
Towards the moving sky.

Behind
The shadow of my pain,
The shadow of my shame lies in the roadway,
And all the moving of the tides
Moves in one open eye.

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HOLLIS SUMMERS

The Appearance

In September the cardinal appeared, dead
Among the green leaves of the forsythia hedge
Against my office window. Dead when he appeared

He seemed alive in profile with his single
Eye staring alive, and his closer wing
Stretched like a bird's wing flying.

As the leaves yellowed and fell I watched the bird
Held by the branches, holding his bright color.
But I could not draw his profile; to be remembered

He had to be seen; even a batted eye
Demolished him; and no one can verify
Any bird without looking away.

To all appearances from my protected view
Within his static flight he refused
Decay, though snow and winter finally flew

Here to Easter and the release of new leaf.
Everybody takes a trip for Easter.
I have been relieved of an office for a week.

For a week I have not thought of waking forsythia
Holding a still bright bird like a myth
Of death transformed by the fact of faith.

* *

I do not mean for these words to embarrass
Either of us; you have been kind to pass
Your eyes among these words as witness;

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Still this morning before morning I dreamed
Your reading face I have never seen turned
To say the dead red bird burned

In my head while all the while the cardinal
Away from both our offices spiralled
Glaring in circles of forsythia yellow.

Indigo Buntings

Always they have sung *fire-fire,*
And asked *where,* and answered *here;*
But I have been and am again blind
To the sudden blue of indigo buntings.

Rarely do they fly at all now
Even black for my eyes calling
Their simple repeated alarm and question
Answering twice their high repetitions.

I cannot remember the summer
When I first learned their color
Or first knew where their fire burned.
But once my eyes turned blue.

The Making

Once, in winter, sleep having left
My bed, I left too, hating
To lie alone, to wait whatever waiting
Morning waited. I started to draw a weft
Of lines to illustrate the tree that pressed
Black as a pencil drawing in light as gray
As ashes against the window waiting day.
I planned for later leaves, and later grass.

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I sat, solid as a chimney, thinking
Possible color, but concentrating black.
I looked away no longer than it took
To draw a branch. A nuthatch clicked.
The tree shimmered white on indigo.
I had drawn the day, and snow.

The Chase

For the sounds of hounds to float to
I need height to listen from
And still night air to come through
Knowing I hear better dumb
On a cliff rock close to stars
Not having to see or name the place
I lie cold alone to hear
The music of a fox race

Listening to what I do not watch
Finding what I have never lost
My dog sings night after the fox
I will we will never catch.

PETER DAVISON

At Heaven's Gate

Sit down with me and rest,
  Beloved guest.
These gardens I have made
  Where summer shade
Is shaken from leaf to leaf.

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Here is no desert where
  Death circles in the air.
Here the rich scent of fruit
  Has clambered from the root
To triumph on the bough.

Behind you lies the earth
  That gave you birth
And troubled you to death.
  Forget the names for grief
And danger now.

If some have turned again
  In search of pain,
The risk they undertake
  Sets the whole world at stake.
You go? Go then. Go then.
  Go for My sake.

Wren

The dark wood moved.
Between the stumps
Along the brook
Life lingered, danced.

Leaves out of place?
Wind at a twig?
The shadow delayed,
Flickered, advanced.

By the fringe of a thirsty
Thicket, the thing
Flirted its flag
Of a tail and pranced

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Till a stray sunbeam
Discovered its eye.
The needle beak
Froze fixed, entranced.

Though signs of wren
Forsook the scene,
Through circumstance
The wood had danced.

Hunger

Western gods are seldom fat:
Priests and painters see to that.
Christian men at grips with Mammon
Show their fealty by their famine.

Smiling Buddhas of the East,
Plump and padded from the feast,
Pensive, wonderful and wise,
Feed the hollow Buddhist's eyes.

Hungering Buddhist solves the test
If he sets his mind at rest
By the Way that Buddha set him:
"You, who love your god, forget him."

Yet, in matters Eucharistic,
Westerner is proved the mystic:
Though the mystery defeats him,
If he loves his God, he eats Him.

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LEWIS MEYERS

The Red Death

The red death of October,
A surveyor with his skull on a tripod, dials
His telescope to pin-point summer.
I pick up the tiny clang of a maple
Gnawed to its marrow. A buzz-saw shrieks.
Griddled nubs of columns puff
And sizzle a month from now when steam drills
Widen my spine, a turnpike to purgatory.
The surveyor winds his tape; he
Totters off the edge of my eye.

Coming on his heels,
A monster lizard of leaves drags its
Tail and scuttles back and forth.
The wind eggs on hooded
Grotesques from each nest of rags.
The sky's bruises deepen.
Windows dimly blink
On the mansioned parkway; I see the creek,
A yellow streak on flimsy logs,
Lose its sloppy life in a mill's waterfall.
A water rat comes
To peer at a terraced cemetery hill. Stone
Crosses crush a rail of pikes into
My right side.

I pick a scab of moss
Off a sick trunk and wait.

On the hill, a towering mother of sorrow
Stumbles in iron sandals
Past the man-size slabs, each with its brass ring;
One look sucks me dry.
I know her face from my bedroom mirror:

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Hollow, blotched with limp tea-bags, lips
Thinned from long choosing to die.
Secluded, juiceless, cool,
She holds my eye until it droops.

I have to survive the winter.

The Revolutionary's Death

Sirens calling a halt,
The black marias gun their motors, groan
At the trees of Jesus.
Cops spin out and sword-dance with billy-sticks
On pickets gone limp.

A girl is raised by her hair. A buzzard
Swoops to stab a mouse.

When I whine, a blackjack's lump of lead
Flops on my scalp
Like a live shark slapped on creaking planks.

Wobbly, wet, breathless,
I drop past knee-caps of water. There
Where Roosevelt dimes anchor the shrunken poor,
Negroes gasp like strangled bait, and babies
Bawl in napalmed oyster beds.

I screech at my dead weight.

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ROBERT SWARD

Attic by the River

I walk by the used river
Each day
  past an old attic
(No house, the attic only
Beech trees growing through it)
In a field. The river smells
Of barges, rotting timbers
    waterskiers' boats, lovers,
The very sun upon it.
Rivers age in Connecticut,
Grow feeble, irritable
And complain like old women.
The charred attic, too
      complains
Bears ill-will toward people,
        weeps
And cries, and talks aloud
On certain evenings
      to the sea.

Elm Trees

Down hill, the elm trees
In the sunlight,
Their trunks darkish
Under branches, under leaves.
Higher up the hill
In this woman's arms
I see through to the other side
As into another season,
The sun suddenly all
On one side of the leaves.

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J. MITCHELL MORSE

The Choreography of "The New Novel"

FRANCE IS THE ONLY COUNTRY where the novel is not merely repeating itself; the new forms evolving there require, as radically new forms always do, an exercise of more than everyday open-mindedness and good will on our part as readers; otherwise we won't understand them—we will have chosen not to understand them. The more liberal, more venturesome choice is difficult, for it takes us into a strange new continent of literature, where the basic assumptions with which we have approached all novels for the last two hundred years are irrelevant and the basic standards we have applied are inapplicable; but this uncomfortable condition cannot be helped, for the new novelists are not trying to do what any of the old ones did.

Nor is the question of talent particularly relevant. Huysmans' remark that there are only two kinds of writers, those with talent and those without, expresses a truth too obvious, too vague and too limited to be helpful; its uselessness indicates the futility of criticism that undertakes primarily to evaluate rather than to elucidate the work of contemporary writers. For the primary function of any criticism above the level of a tip service must be to help the reader understand what the writer is doing. It must devote itself to the task of accurate description, whose demands in the way of imagination, though seldom appreciated, make it a rather rare achievement. All the critic need do in the way of evaluation is make what Jean Paulhan calls the preliminary intuitive judgment that the book is worth discussing at all.[1] Having made that judgment, says Paulhan (discounting his own long practical experience), if the critic then attacks the book he is probably wrong; but in any case his written evaluation doesn't matter. The only other judgment that matters is that of those readers whom C. S. Lewis calls literary readers: the readers who, delighting in the con-

[1] In *Petite préface à toute critique* (Editions de Minuit, 1951). Cf. C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1961).

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templation of a writer's skill with language, structure, characterization and other elements of the literary art—delighting, that is to say, in a writer's performance as performance—read certain books more than once. These are the readers who over a period of years, without regarding the critics, either do or do not provide a market for new editions. They determine which books last and become classics.

This is not to imply that our non-literary responses should be ignored. Only minor good writers, such as Edmund Waller and Logan Pearsall Smith, give us a merely literary pleasure; the great writers—Shakespeare, Dante, Dostoievsky, Joyce—arouse in addition all kinds of moral, religious, political and social responses; but bad writers also arouse such responses, and uncritical readers are always in the market for their works, which rapidly replace each other because none has any distinctive quality as a work of art. Distinctive quality is a product of skill; only a skillful performance invites or repays a second reading; and only readers who can respond to the performance as performance come back for a second reading.

To such readers, criticism as it is generally practiced is of no use or value. The generality of critics, playing the popular game of evaluation, are concerned less with the text than with its probable reception; as experts in what will go, they almost inevitably discount the unfamiliar work that requires an unaccustomed response; they seldom differ with popular taste—the taste for happy or sad or soothing or rousing books addressed entirely to our most accustomed non-literary responses. The generality of critics have therefore almost always been wrong in their pronouncements on literary quality. Like Peer Gynt's trolls, they delude and are deluded. They attacked Racine and praised Galbert de Campistron, attacked Whitman and praised Thomas Bailey Aldrich, attacked Baudelaire and praised Léon Dierx, attacked Lawrence and praised Maurice Hewlett, attacked Joyce and praised Warwick Deeping. Now they attack Robbe-Grillet and praise Mary Renault. The Campistrons, Aldriches, Dierx, Hewletts, Deepings and Renaults come and go in endless vain succession, endlessly replaced and forgotten. Who now reads *The Song of Renny* or *Sorrell and Son*? Where now is Miss Peanut Butter of 1947? What though bright heralds trumpeted her in her hour? If criticism is to be some-

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thing more dignified than a herald of meretricious writing, if it is to guide or at least accompany perceptive readers, if it is to be of any use, the most useful question it can ask is not what is good and what is bad but what is what. It must be concerned not so much with talent, which we can't judge objectively, as with interest, which we can. I am not talking about fashion; I am talking about the kind of demonstrable complexity or subtlety or ingenuity that makes one piece of writing more interesting than another to anyone who is interested in the art, as one piece of machinery is more interesting than another to an engineer, or one case of sickness is more interesting than another to a doctor, because it gives his intelligence more to work on. An informed reader of modern fiction approaches it with an interest of essentially the same kind: he is almost a professional: he is, if not a writer's writer, at least a writer's reader. Even Robbe-Grillet's putative reader who needs no qualification but good will must be able to see what is going on if he is to enjoy the book; since he has good will he educates himself as he goes along to what the writer is doing, and ends more perceptive than he began. But what is good will? In these terms it would seem to be an openness to, a capacity for, literary pleasure: not necessarily or primarily pleasure in vicarious experience—vicarious adventure, vicarious courage, vicarious love, vicarious thought—but pleasure in a real experience of art: pleasure, that is to say, in a writer's performance as performance. This implies a certain sensitivity to language to begin with: the by no means common ability to hear, for example, the difference between a four-beat line and a five-beat line, or between rhyme and assonance, or between natural dialogue, artificial dialogue, and phony dialogue. Such a reader naturally is or naturally becomes a writer's reader; and writers who are concerned with their art naturally address themselves to him rather than to a reader on whom artistry would be lost, who seeks in reading only simulated feelings and ready-to-use thoughts. One enjoys a subtle reality, the other prefers delusion. These two readers, and the respective writers who address them, define the difference between literature and *poncif*. It is essentially a moral difference. The function of a hack reviewer is to introduce hack writers to hack readers; with the freedom of naiveté or cynicism or both—the two are not at all incompatible—he does it largely in terms of Talent and

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Genius. But serious criticism is not an introduction service, or a celebrity service either; its function is of a different nature. To the extent that the purely literary qualities of a piece of writing can be isolated from its moral or social or religious or political implications, a serious critic must ask who, in literary terms, are the most interesting writers of our day, and why, in literary terms, are they interesting?

This question is not only more useful than the question about talent, it is also easier to answer. In fact, the answer suggests itself: the most interesting writers of our day are those who are experimenting with new techniques. We can even paraphrase Huysmans and say that there are now only two kinds of writers: those who are refining the techniques of their art and those who are not.

By using the word "refining," which involves a value judgment, I may seem to be begging the question; but I think I can demonstrate that there are objective grounds for the judgment: that it is a judgment of fact, as when we look at the two sides of a ruler and judge correctly that one side will enable us to make finer measurements than the other. This analogy implies that the quality of a piece of writing is not altogether ineffable.

We can demonstrate, to take an easy example, that *Ulysses* is more interesting than *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—not as a matter of opinion but as a matter of fact. In the second chapter of the *Portrait* there is an old-fashioned flashback, when the word "Admit!" and the tap of a cane on his leg remind Stephen Dedalus of a bitter experience he has had some years earlier (pp. 78-82 in the Compass Books edition, 87-91 in the Modern Library edition, and 326-330 in *The Portable James Joyce*). The flashback, though well-written and valid in itself, comes as an interruption during which time is suspended; the present action stops, frozen in tableau, and fades out of focus; the actors regroup themselves in another setting, and when the interlude is over return to the interrupted action, which suddenly swims back into focus. In *Ulysses* the recollection of the past is conveyed more subtly and thus more truly and with more literary interest. On page 269 of the Modern Library edition,[2] for example, Bloom, having heard Richie Goulding order steak and kidney pie, and having a moment later overheard Simon Dedalus speaking of "Mrs. Marion Bloom" in con-

[2] In the 1961 edition only. The corresponding page in earlier editions is 265.

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nection with "trunkhose," thinks silently, "Mrs. Marion met him pike hoses. Smell of burn of Paul de Kock. Nice name he." In the immediate context this doesn't seem to make sense, but in the context of the novel as a whole it makes sense because it recalls the morning scene on pp. 64-65,[3] where Bloom's wife asks him to explain a word she pronounces "met him pike hoses" (metempsychosis), tells him to bring her from the rental library another book by Paul de Kock—"Nice name he has"—and suddenly says, "There's a smell of burn. Did you leave anything on the fire?" As we know, he had left his breakfast kidney. In the *Portrait,* past and present are sharply separated: we forget the present action until the flashback is over; but in *Ulysses* the memory of the past is blended with the continuing action and conversation of the present, which are not suspended but enriched by the addition—our consciousness, like Bloom's, encompassing two situations simultaneously and making them one. The continuing presence of the past, its living reality, Joyce conveyed in *Ulysses* more vividly than he knew how to do when he wrote the *Portrait.* This is a refinement of technique: it permits a more accurate portrayal of reality both external and internal; it also demands more of the reader in the way of alertness and attention to the writer's performance as performance, and gives him accordingly a more sophisticated pleasure. In this sense we can say quite objectively that one piece of writing is more interesting than another.

Right now the most interesting writers are those who are still carrying forward the literary revolution that began—if such things can be said to begin at one point rather than another—in the first quarter of our century with Joyce, Proust and Kafka, the old masters of the modern novel. It is essentially a revolution in the refinement of technique. Of course the processes of assimilation and advance are seldom separate and not always distinguishable: Faulkner in 1929 was doing most of the things the most advanced technicians are doing now, and he never afterwards developed technically beyond the point he then reached in *The Sound and the Fury.* Literary techniques, even the most startling, are not invented suddenly; they evolve. But three unmistakably new conceptions of form are evolving now; and in all three the spirit of

[3] These page numbers are the same in earlier editions. Random House's casual change of pagination has infuriated students of *Ulysses,* because it destroys the usefulness of Hanley's word-index and seriously reduces that of other excellent guides.

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geometry and the spirit of finesse are combined. These terms have always stood for antithetical tendencies; but in the integrally planned and finely executed structures of certain contemporary novelists the tendencies are reconciled in what may be called the spirit of the dance. Proust—in whose own choreography absolute fluidity and perfect order were one—spoke of "those finished works of art in which not one touch is lacking, in which every part in turn receives from all the rest a justification which it confers on them." Such seems to be the ideal of those contemporary French novelists whose works are loosely grouped under the term *le nouveau roman,* and of the very few novelists in other countries who have adopted their techniques—for it is the French, generally speaking, who have set the new directions.

Directions, plural. The term *nouveau roman* is so loose that it misleads us, for it implies that there is a single direction, although at least three are discernible; and in any case the individuality of talented writers cannot be thus categorically disposed of. The first of the three tendencies, in fact, is that of a single writer, Samuel Beckett, who is customarily included among "the practitioners of the new novel," though he is of an older generation than the others to whom that unconsciously insulting term is applied, though the principal sources of his art are not French or even Irish but I think Jewish, though what he is doing is totally unlike what anybody else is doing, and though he is demonstrably of larger size than any other writer now writing. I shall return to him. The other two tendencies have a common origin, the revolt against Balzac;[4] their divergent lines of development I call Brancusi's Way and—though this will arouse denials—Joyce's Way. Brancusi's Way seeks that absolute simplicity by which a supreme sophistication expresses the subtlest and therefore most complex relations; Joyce's Way seeks to express the complexity of relations by a matching complexity of structure, leaving their subtlety, as perhaps it must remain by definition, implicit. For the Brancusians, complexity is inherent in subtlety; for the Joyceans—who are Joyceans despite themselves—subtlety is inherent in com-

[4] Michel Butor observes, in his 1959 essay "Balzac et la réalité," that the revolt is based on a misconception, since most people have read only fragments of Balzac's work and therefore have no appreciation of its unity and its essential modernity. Proust, on the other hand, says its unity is more apparent than real, the result of retrospective retouching rather than design. But whatever the case may be, the revolt is a fact of literary history.

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plexity. This is not mere play with words; it expresses a difference of theory that underlies two sharply different kinds of novel.

But we must remember their common origin. The revolt against Balzac started with Proust, another old master to whom the new novelists are more indebted than they like to admit. In "Aimer Balzac" he shows a fine awareness of the merits of that vulgar mind, and in his own work he uses some of Balzac's devices; but in a sketch of the salon of Mme. Madeleine Lemaire he parodies Balzac's excessive interstitial explicitness, and in a letter to Robert Dreyfus, which the Joycean Nathalie Sarraute quotes with approval, he says, "Not once does any of my characters close a window, or wash his hands, or put on an overcoat, or utter a formula of introduction. If there is anything at all new in this book, it is that." This is not altogether true; leafing through *The Captive* at random, I find a contrary example right away: "M. de Charlus unbuttoned his greatcoat, took off his hat, and I saw that the top of his head had now turned silver in patches" (Modern Library, p. 305). But it is true for the most part; in any case the ideal is clear: Proust wanted only significant details; and the rebels against Balzac tend to consider all the traditional details of characterization irrelevant: not only the network of veins on a bourgeois' nose, the buttons on his coat, the stocks in his account and the family in his tree, but also his personality, his inner life, his being—as we used to say, his soul. Their people have no ready-made character, nor do the objects in their world have any ready-made significance; in the Brancusian novels the objects are as sketchily indicated as the people, in the Joycean novels they are meticulously detailed, since they constitute the world as it is given, but in neither do they stand for anything; only by observing the complex interactions of people and objects can we make a provisional estimate of the possible significance of the action—as in life. Ideally, the interpretation depends entirely on us, not at all on the author.

Joyce's practice was radically different, not only from that of the Brancusians but even from that of the Joyceans: for not only does Bloom wash his hands, but first he turns on the water and then he unwraps the soap; we observe with him that the paper is stuck to it, and share his feelings as he pulls it off. Joyce dramatizes such details, so that they are not insignificant or arbitrary but part of the story and essential to it; with Joyce we do not act nowhere,

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at no time, and on nothing; we act among and upon people and things, and are acted upon by them; time, place and furniture are significant because, but only because, we are among them. Not only does Bloom unwrap the soap, the soap also unwraps Bloom. Those who follow Joyce's way share his attention to detail and his complexity of structure, but they disavow his concern with the impact of the outer world on the inner. Where Joyce saw epiphanies, they see only surfaces. They refuse to interpret anything. They tell us what a man does, but don't presume to read his mind, construe his motives or expound his feelings; whether or not they are consciously existentialists, they have adopted the existentialist method of confining themselves to what is given by naive experience. But their confidence that such humility leads to truth is unfounded; it seems not to have occurred to any of them that unconstrued observation is an intellectual art of extreme difficulty, and that nothing is more conventional and false than the gifts of naive experience. However, their practice is better than their theory—as we shall see.

The Brancusians seek an even more radical simplicity, eliminating not only character and psychology but as much as possible the external world also. They present only abstract designs: slowly developing arabesques of relationship, revealed in dialogue or monologue, without comment by the author and without "distraction," as Mme. Sarraute puts it, by the physical aspect of the characters or the world they inhabit. Two characters sit in a park or a café. What kind of park? What kind of café? Large? Small? Clean? Dirty? A park. A café. They have no faces, no proportions, no ages, no particular clothes, and sometimes no names. They are not described, only identified in general terms: "a man," "a woman," "a little boy." Is the little boy three years old? Six? Ten? No matter. These writers have the courage of their exclusions.

For reasons I shall go into later, I think the Brancusians are demonstrably less interesting than the Joyceans; this does not imply that they are inferior talents, but only that they have gone farther and been more consistent—consistent to the point of death—in refusing to do what they no longer consider worth doing. Like Picasso, who in a series of six lithographs reduced a fine specimen of a bull, muscular, hairy and bully indeed, to an antiseptic arrangement of arcs and chords—which, though interesting as an

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expression of the artist's point of view and as a revelation of his method, is in itself less interesting than the bully bull—or like Brancusi, whose alleged portrait of Joyce is a spiral that signifies but does not represent the inner ear, these novelists eliminate everything but the formal elements of design—not only the elements of what for them would be a merely perfunctory verisimilitude, but also any ideas they may have, any thoughts their characters might have, any style or grace of language that might draw attention to itself, and even any reference points that might help the reader establish the design too easily.

Marguerite Duras is a case in point. She is prolific and talented, but she has chosen to suppress the most engaging aspects of her talent. Between 1944 and 1953 she published five good old-fashioned novels, intelligent, humane, warm-hearted, peopled with real people, set with real settings, and well-constructed in a conventional way; in 1954 she published *Des journées entières dans les arbres,* a group of four short stories which in the order of their appearance show more and more complexity of outline and less and less incidental detail, so that as our literary responses are sharpened our non-literary responses are eliminated; and with the appearance of *Le Square* in 1955 her novels began somewhat hesitantly to follow the same course. It is a course in which we are led to concentrate more and more on the performance as performance and less and less on the characters as human beings. This, I think, is a loss both for us as readers and for Mme. Duras as a writer; for the two kinds of interest are not mutually exclusive, and when literary experimentation becomes an end in itself the work is accordingly impoverished.

In *Le Square* we have a nameless man and a nameless woman sitting on a park bench and talking from about three o'clock in the afternoon until it begins to get dark. In terms of action, that is the whole story; nevertheless, Mme. Duras holds our interest for 156 pages: not only our literary interest as observers of her performance but also our philosophical interest in the conversation, and even our naive interest as readers of a novel, all disbelief quite willingly suspended, in what may be the beginning of a personal relationship between the man and the woman. It is a thoroughly satisfactory novel in every respect; even the anonymity of the characters is justified, in formal terms because their conversation neither

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requires nor permits the gesture of an introduction, and in philosophical terms because, though their views differentiate them quite sharply as individuals, Mme. Duras seems to be interested in them less as individuals than as representatives of tendencies in anonymous humanity. Their appearance is not defined. The man seems to be middle-aged; the woman gives her age first as 21 and later as 22; she may or may not be either; it doesn't matter. The essential point is that she is a young domestic servant who rejects all opportunities to make her work easier because she doesn't want to become reconciled to it, and the man is a sidewalk salesman of shoelaces and razorblades who rejects all opportunities to improve his position lest the effort disturb his wistful reconcilement. She wants to be a bourgeoise with a home of her own; he prefers his lonely torpor; the difference between them is perhaps as fundamental as a difference of metabolism; nevertheless they understand each other, they are attracted to each other, and the novel ends with a possibility, though no more than a possibility, that they will meet again. For an ordinary novelist this situation would be a quagmire of sentimentality; Mme. Duras keeps us on firm ground through firm control: through the accuracy of her psychology and the melodic or choreographic design of the argument, which she manages with such skill that we can return to it again and again with pleasure. *Le Square* seems to me her most successful work.

Three years later she carried the Brancusian principle much farther, in *Moderato Cantabile*—far enough, I think, to demonstrate its limitations as a fictional method; for *Moderato Cantabile,* though interesting as a performance, has no other interest. Though it follows the structure of the Beethoven Diabelli sonatina that is at once its key symbol and its organizing principle, and though the sonatina does arouse non-musical responses by purely musical means, Mme. Duras fails in her obvious effort to arouse a non-literary response by purely literary means, because the situation in which she puts her characters is not tragic but only stupid, since they have no interest as human beings or even as characters in a novel. They are blanks—like musical notes. She manipulates them with great skill, developing their relationship through an elegant formal structure of repeated words and phrases; according to Saint Augustine, that is the way God composes the song of human history; but in literary works by merely human authors,

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formal elegance is not enough. Mme. Duras' failure here is due not to incapacity but to her absolute fidelity to a false theory; for the situation has all the elements of an interesting story, but she deliberately refuses to exploit them.

Her central character, Anne Desbaresdes, is the bored wife of a provincial industrialist, who enters into a relationship of psychological adultery with one of her husband's workers; the fact that no physical adultery takes place suggests the unconsummated state of this novel. It is a novel not of love but of heat and titillation, in form as well as content. Anne Desbaresdes, as a way to relieve her boredom somewhat, takes her small son to a weekly piano lesson at the other end of town; this gives her a legitimate reason to walk through neighborhoods she would not otherwise walk through. The piano teacher's apartment overlooks the Desbaresdes shipyards and a workers' café; one afternoon during the lesson a man kills his wife or mistress in the café, then throws himself on her body and kisses her bloody mouth; after the lesson Anne parks her son on the piano teacher's stoop and goes into the café to find out what has happened; a workman named Chauvin answers her questions as far as he can, they are fiercely attracted to each other, and after that she meets him in the café every afternoon. The excuse for the meetings is that she wants to know why the man killed his wife or mistress and Chauvin is supposedly trying to find out; they are both quite aware of the flimsiness of the excuse, and they become increasingly aware that when they talk about the case, speculating on the relationship of the couple and all the possible feelings on both sides, they are really talking about themselves. When the parallel becomes quite clear they agree not to meet again, and Anne is desolated. This interesting situation could obviously be the material for an excellent novel; what keeps Mme. Duras' novel from being excellent is her refusal to fill in the outline by developing the characters. Nobody in *Moderato Cantabile* is a person we can care about, because nobody is a person at all—and the abstract notion of sexuality isn't very interesting. Anne Desbaresdes is only a mouth that drinks wine and utters dullnesses: "Perhaps they had problems, what they call emotional problems," she says. Toward the end we learn that she has blonde hair; that is all. Chauvin is just a figure who buys the wine—or the blood, if you prefer; his name may very well mean

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something, if you care, though there is no reason that you should; all we know about him is that he is in love with Anne; we don't know what he looks like or how old he is or why he loves her or what he feels or what he thinks, because he too utters only dullnesses: "Yes, they must have had emotional problems," he says. "Maybe that's why he killed her, who knows?" Anne's son is a little boy of no name and no appearance, anywhere from five to ten years old, who starts out well as a character but lapses into nonentity after the opening scene. He starts out by refusing to remember anything he has been told or to do anything he has been shown how to do, exasperating his teacher and rather pleasing his mother by his rebellious silence, which he breaks only once, when they tell him if he doesn't try he'll never learn: "I don't want to learn to play the piano." We have here the basis for an interesting character, but Mme. Duras never develops it: the boy remains nothing but a sort of abstract disembodied stubbornness. The piano teacher and the patronne of the café also remain the merest sketches, and the shipyard workers who come and go are only shadows. There isn't a live person in the whole book. There is therefore no nonliterary interest.

The literary interest is also slight, because it depends entirely on the design of the whole and not at all on the execution of details. The choreographic iteration and interweaving of motifs—the relationship between the murderer and the murdered woman, the parallel relationship between Anne and Chauvin, the ebb and flow of the shipyard workers, the changing light, the shifting wind, the smell of magnolias—such patterns and such obvious symbols do not carry enough interest to sustain a novel, even for a writer's reader.

There is no way to chart a writer's future course, but at the moment it looks as if Mme. Duras may have given up the novel as a medium for anything serious she has to say. In 1959 she wrote a good movie, *Hiroshima Mon Amour,* which uses many of the techniques of the Joyceans; in 1960 a schmaltzy play, *Les Viaducs de la Seine et Oise,* which is like Eugene O'Neill at his worst; in 1961 a good movie of a conventional kind, *Une aussi longue absence;* and in 1962, with the collaboration of James Lord, *La Bête dans la Jungle,* a play based on Henry James's story. Her most recent novel at this writing, *Dix heures et demie du soir en*

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été, published in 1960, cannot be taken seriously. Its theme is similar to that of *Moderato Cantabile*: the effects of a crime of passion on the relations of a married couple who hear about it; but its prose is pure soap opera, its structure is entirely conventional, and its resolution of the family's emotional difficulties is a standard commercial triumph of morality over art. So that the best of the Brancusians seems, for the time being at least, to have abandoned the "new novel."

Such a development may be a sign of superior wisdom on her part—a recognition that in literature Brancusi's way tends to be self-defeating; for as the dance of relationships approaches the ideal of absolute abstraction it should simultaneously approach the ideal of absolute convolution, but the two ideals are inherently contradictory: since all human qualities are concrete qualities of individuals, their progressive elimination makes convolution less and less possible. Sartre's brilliant essay of 1949 on Calder's mobiles tempted Michel Butor—in "Le roman comme recherche," 1955—to see in them an analogue to the "new novel," since their charm lies not in their materials but in the vitality of their motion. But the analogy with literature is false; for whatever the case may be in nature, in literature we cannot have motion without recognizable objects that move; absolute or pure motion is not an ideal but a mere meaningless juxtaposition of words; and there is no point at which the elimination of superfluities does not eliminate something essential. We cannot separate a human being from his externalities; there are no false appearances. A man's coat is of his essence; though he may have chosen it with the intention of misleading us, and though it may in fact mislead us, its falsity does not misrepresent the falsity it covers: by misrepresenting himself, the misrepresenter presents himself most truly: the coat is unavoidably the man. In life there is no man without qualities, for the lack of qualities is itself a quality. Only in literature can a character really be a blank; the writers who now present us with such characters are for the first time trying to produce a serious literature that is not about human beings. This is an interesting technical experiment, but since the human relationships that blanks can develop are necessarily simple, its interest is limited. Choreography is perhaps the only art that requires no intellect.

Joyce's way is much more interesting, and I think those who

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follow it produce more interesting novels. I call it Joyce's way because Joyce is the master whom contemporary writers follow, willingly or unwillingly, when they write novels of simultaneity; but with almost equal justice it can be called Gutzkow's way, for Karl Gutzkow originated the idea in 1850, and Joyce hinted at his own indebtedness by relating the audible and the visible to "the *nacheinander*" and "the *nebeneinander*" respectively in the Proteus episode of *Ulysses.* (There is an excellent brief discussion of Gutzkow's theory in Bruno Markwardt's *Geschichte der Deutschen Poetik,* IV, 188-192, 591-592.) Gutzkow called his nine-volume novel *Die Ritter vom Geiste* "ein Roman des Nebeneinander," a novel of the simultaneity of events in space, and in his preface clearly stated that he intended it to be radically different from the conventional "Roman des Nacheinander," the novel of the sequence of events in time. Of course life is lived both in space and in time, and no novel can ignore either, but Gutzkow wanted to make his organizing principle simultaneity rather than sequence. The Roman des Nebeneinander, he said, would be like a cross section of a ship or a mine, with life going on in many places simultaneously in obedience to an over-all guiding purpose. He did not succeed in bringing it off, because he did not see that the new principle would require new techniques—that simultaneity could not be adequately rendered by such a simple device as sentences beginning "While" or "Meanwhile," or the continuing presence of the past by such simple devices as documents, reports, memoranda, recollections and confessions. It was his precept, not his example, that influenced Joyce, and through him most subsequent serious writers. For Joyce worked out techniques that made the novel of simultaneity possible. No other novelist has yet been able to use the techniques of *Finnegans Wake,* by which all history becomes "one continuous present tense," but those of *Ulysses* are worthily continued and extended in such novels as Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Le Voyeur* and Michel Butor's *Degrés,* which I shall use as examples.

The puzzling and apparently misleading title *Le Voyeur* is a clue to the whole meaning of the novel: for it may apply equally well to the central character, a salesman named Mathias, or to the cross-eyed but all-seeing Julian Marek, the seemingly dimwitted young fisherman who knows so much and understands so well. One

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of these men apparently tortures, rapes, and murders a young girl; the other apparently hides in the bushes and looks on; but which is the criminal and which the voyeur, or rather which the active and which the speculative criminal, it is impossible to say. If we must have a moral—but no. No. It would be one of those truths that become false as soon as they are stated. Art has nothing to do with such diagrams. We mere critics and appreciators are tempted to make diagrams by way of sharing the occasions of our joy; the temptation is especially strong when the occasion is so largely a matter of formal brilliance as is *Le Voyeur* and the critic is one who has just said that the quality of a piece of writing is not altogether ineffable. Nevertheless, to the extent that it is effable we must try to eff it in some other way.

From the very first page we are strongly moved by *Le Voyeur,* and a little reflection shows that we are moved for two reasons: (1)—a non-literary reason—because we are seeing the world from the point of view of a disordered and venal mind, and (2)—a literary reason—because Robbe-Grillet handles language with such skill that we must take him seriously as a writer—in a way that we cannot take seriously Ray Bradbury, for example, who is said to be a "good" science fiction writer and who opens what is said to be a "good" science fiction story, "The Pedestrian," with the sentence, "To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do." Compare this sentence—its "enter out," its use of "that" for "the," "your" for "his" and "silences" for "silence," its saxophonic tone, its witless, boneless flab and sag—with these two describing a door in *Le Voyeur*: "The varnished paint, recently renewed, imitated the veins and irregularities of wood to a fault. Judging from the sound of his knock, there could be no doubt that under this deceptive layer the door was really a wooden one." These sentences, unlike Bradbury's, were written by a man in full control of his medium. Even the cliché "to a fault" is appropriate, since it describes cliché decoration. In these two small but quite representative samples we have the difference between a writer who must be taken seriously and a writer who cannot be taken seriously by anyone who is at all

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sensitive to language. Making such comparisons is one way to eff the quality of a piece of writing.

Another way is to examine its structure and see whether it is arbitrary or whether the author uses it to help make his non-literary point. On this score too, Robbe-Grillet's performance must be taken seriously. Consider three café scenes from *Le Voyeur,* in which we see a mind progressively disintegrating. The first, on pages 44-45 of the Grove Press edition, takes place before the murder:

> The next shop was the café "A l'Espérance." He walked in. The first thing to do in a café is to buy a drink. He went to the bar, set his suitcase on the floor between his feet, and asked for an absinthe.
>
> The girl working behind the bar had a timorous face and the ill-assured manner of a dog that had been whipped. . . .
>
> Three men—three sailors—whom Mathias had passed as they were arguing in front of the door walked in and sat down at a table. They ordered red wine. The barmaid walked around the bar, awkwardly carrying the bottle and three glasses stacked one inside the other. . . .
>
> She was not used to the job. She poured too slowly, constantly watching the level of the liquid in the glass, determined not to waste a drop. When the third one was filled to the brim she raised the bottle and, holding it in both hands, returned to her place with lowered eyes. At the other end of the bar the man watched her severely as she approached him, walking with short steps. . . .
>
> Four syllables rang out. But instead of breaking the silence they were completely assimilated by it: "Are you asleep?"

The second, on page 89, takes place in another café, shortly after the murder:

> . . . The girl behind the bar had a timorous face and the ill-assured manner of a dog that had been ill-assured manner of a dog that had been ill-assured manner of a girl who served behind the . . . Behind the bar, a fat woman with a satisfied, jovial face beneath her abundant gray hair was pouring drinks for two workmen in blue overalls. She handled the bottle with the sure gestures of a professional, raising the neck with a slight rotation of her wrist at the precise moment the liquid reached the edge of the glass. The salesman went to the bar, set his suitcase on the floor between his feet, and ordered an absinthe.
>
> Without thinking, the salesman was about to order an absinthe when he changed his mind—just before having spoken the word. He cast about for the name of some other kind of drink, and, unable to think of any, pointed to the bottle the proprietress was still holding after having served the two lighthouse workers.

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"I'll have the same," he said, and set the suitcase on the floor between his feet.

The woman put in front of him a glass like the first two; she filled it with her other hand, which had not yet released the bottle—making the same rapid movement, so that a large quantity of liquid was still in the air, between the bottom of the glass and the neck of the bottle, as she was already lifting the latter away. At the very second she had finished twisting her wrist, the surface of the poured liquid immobilized on a level with the edge of the glass—without the slightest miniscus—like a diagram representing the theoretical capacity of the glass.

The third, on page 190, takes place in the evening:

Mathias finished his absinthe. No longer feeling the little suitcase between his legs, he lowered his eyes toward the floor. The suitcase had disappeared. He thrust his hand into his duffle coat pocket to rub his grease-spotted fingers against the wad of cord, keeping his eyes fixed on the salesman. The proprietress thought he was looking for change and shouted out the price of his drink; but it was the absinthe he was going to pay for. He turned to face the fat woman, or the woman, or the girl, or the young barmaid, then set down the suitcase in order to pick up the suitcase while the sailor and the fisherman sneaked between, crept between, came between, Mathias and the salesman. . . .

I think I hear all kinds of tinkling ecclesiatical symbols here, but perhaps they are sounding only in my ears. However that may be, in these three scenes and in many others like them Robbe-Grillet makes it beautifully clear that nothing is clear. Mathias is a door-to-door salesman of wrist watches; he goes back to the little island where he was born, with the idea of playing on people's sentimental recollections of him in order to sell them watches. Almost everywhere he goes he sees signs saying, "Buy your watch at your jeweler's"—one of many touches that remind us of Kafka, to whom Robbe-Grillet acknowledges his indebtedness. While Mathias is on the island, a thirteen-year-old girl is tied up, burned with cigarettes, raped, and thrown over the cliff into the sea. As soon as he hears about it, Mathias begins to think up alibis. He can account for every moment of his day, with witnesses, except the half-hour between the time the girl was last seen alive and the time her body was found. That half-hour is a blank in his memory: he has no witnesses for it, not even himself. Almost immediately he assumes that he is the criminal—as the police tell us many imper-

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fectly conscious people do after every particularly gruesome crime. He even remembers how he tied the girl up, how he burned her, etc. But then he remembers many things that have not actually happened: even in the most ordinary matters he is unable to distinguish between what is true, what he wishes were true, what he fears is true, what has already happened, what he hopes will happen, what he fears will happen, and what is happening at the moment. He carries in his wallet a newspaper clipping about a similar crime, and he uses the names of the two girls interchangeably. He visits the scene of the crime and runs into Julian Marek, a dimwitted young fisherman, and in the course of their mutually suspicious conversation it becomes clear to us as readers that one of them committed the crime and the other witnessed it with pleasure, but which did what never becomes clear. It may be that no crime was committed at all: the whole thing may be a mad fantasy of Mathias' as he travels around the island with his suitcase full of watches, or as he stands on the deck of the ship watching the island approach, or as he lies asleep in Paris. The question the café owner throws at the barmaid, "Are you asleep?" may in fact be a question addressed by someone else to the sleeping Mathias, or to Mathias standing in the way of a passenger who wants to go ashore. It is possible to find evidence in the text for each of these interpretations. Robbe-Grillet himself offers no interpretation: his point may be that Mathias lets interpretation outrun observation and that if we want to know what we are doing we should observe as much as possible and interpret as little as possible; or that interpretation is an essential part of observation, without which there could be no observation; but both these notions are too commonplace to occupy a serious writer for the length of a novel. We are dealing, after all, with a work of fiction, not of philosophy; the object before us is strange, complex and artful; it gives us literary pleasure whose sources we can identify, and non-literary pleasure whose sources remain mysterious. The best literature, as literature, does no more.

Michel Butor is a much more popular writer than Robbe-Grillet, because his technical experiments are easier to understand and because his point of view is less disturbing. He seems to me a less interesting writer than Robbe-Grillet, but the quality of his prose, though different, is equally good, and his understanding of our

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more or less sane behavior is as illuminating as Robbe-Grillet's understanding of our delirious somnambulism. In *Degrés* he undertakes to describe and account for everything that takes place in one high school class during one period on an ordinary day. The techniques he uses to convey a sense of the simultaneity of events are not new: some are as old as "While" and "Meanwhile"; others are derived from Joyce, either directly or via Faulkner—the trick of inserting several paragraphs of action or conversation or description between the subject and the verb of a single sentence, or between the subject and its predicate adjectives or predicate nominatives; and the trick of inserting a sentence describing one event into a paragraph describing another, as in the "Wandering Rocks" chapter of *Ulysses.* These techniques caught the hack reviewers of the 1920's unawares—Alfred Noyes said of *Ulysses,* "The writing of the book is bad simply as writing and much of it is obscure through sheer disorder of the syntax"—but during the last forty years they have become so familiar that even reviewers for the daily papers can read Butor without much difficulty; for Butor is less an innovator than a highly competent user of techniques which though relatively new are now firmly established.

The most original and most difficult of all the new writers is undoubtedly Samuel Beckett; he is difficult in the same way that an original logician is difficult, not because he is obscure but because he demands that we think more clearly than we are accustomed to thinking; he is also difficult in the same way that the Neo-Platonists are difficult, because he requires us to have felt the seductiveness of the mystical impulse. But as I read Beckett it seems to me that I am reading something quite traditional in an old tradition—a Talmudic tradition. Whether the influence has reached him indirectly through Kafka, the style of whose thought was Talmudic, or directly through Jewish antecedents—a biographical point on which there are conflicting statements—the Talmudic flavor is certainly there.

For the Talmud is a collection of disputed cases that holds in suspension two conflicting but equally authenticated traditional views of the relation between man and God: on one hand the view that is represented by the stories of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Jephthah and his daughter, the Book of Job, the Epistle to the Romans, and the Book of Revelation, in which

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God is beyond any hope of human comprehension, inscrutable and seemingly capricious; and on the other hand the view represented by Hosea, Isaiah and the Gospels, in which God, popularized and democratized, is a kind father and for a time was actually a human being. We find the two views precariously balanced in such modern Jewish writers as Sholem Aleichem, Isaac Bashevis Singer and I. L. Peretz: we feel the balance quivering in Singer's great short story "Gimpel the Fool," and we see it rocking up and down in Sholem Aleichem's story of the business man Sholem Schachnah, who having telegraphed his wife that he would be home for Passover without fail, and having been delayed because of the confusion following an accidental exchange of hats, is reproached by her: "How dare a human being say 'without fail' . . .?" But the view of an inscrutable, seemingly capricious and perhaps malevolent God has gained much wider currency in the twentieth century through the genius of Kafka, whose heroes of hope keep trying to establish a rational and humane relationship with the God of Abraham and Paul. J. Saunders Redding reports that Negro intellectuals are always fond of Kafka because his view of the world is so like their own experience. In his diary Kafka observes that Karl Rossmann, the central character of *Amerika,* is guilty, and Joseph K., the central character of *The Trial,* is innocent, but both are punished; the only difference is that the guilty is punished less severely than the innocent: the guilty is only pushed aside, but the innocent is struck down.

This is certainly Beckett's view; his characters walk or crawl with a more desperate hope than Kafka's, and lie in bed with a bleaker desolation of despair. He doesn't make very cheerful reading, but nevertheless we read him with delight because of the intellectual games he plays. His universe is insane, but it is also scrupulously complicated, affording large scope for the old Talmudic game of Seek-and-ye-shall-seek. The episode of the piano tuners, in his second novel, *Watt,* is a paradigm of all his work. Watt is a servant in the mansion of a godlike Mr. Knott. There are never any visitors, but one day a father and son, the Galls, announce that they have come "to choon the piano," and Watt leads them into the music-room. He assumes that the father is blind, "like so many members of his profession," but there is nothing in the father's face or attitude to show that he is blind, except that he leans on his

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son—which he might do because of lameness, or even fatigue. There is no family likeness between the two; they may be stepfather and stepson; but on the other hand the lack of family likeness is no proof that they are not a true father and son. To Watt's surprise, moreover, it is the son who tunes the piano; Watt therefore assumes—though it is only an assumption—that the father, feeling his end at hand, is training his son in his livelihood. When the son finishes his work he announces that the strings are unraveling and most of the hammers and dampers missing:

> The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger.
> The piano-tuner also, said the elder.
> The pianist also, said the younger.
> This was perhaps the principal incident of Watt's early days in Mr Knott's house.
> In a sense it resembled all the incidents of note proposed to Watt during his stay in Mr Knott's house, and of which a certain number will be recorded in this place, without addition, or subtraction, and in a sense not.
> It resembled them in the sense that it was not ended, when it was past, but continued to unfold, in Watt's head, from beginning to end, over and over again, the complex connexions of its lights and shadows, the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after, the quickenings and retardings, the approaches and the separations, all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place. It resembled them in the vigour with which it developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal.
> Thus the scene in the music-room, with the two Galls, ceased very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned, an obscure family and professional relation, an exchange of judgments more or less intelligible, and so on, if indeed it had ever signified such things, and became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment.

This incident and others like it—incidents, as Beckett says, "of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport"—might almost be construed as paradigms of the "new novel," but for the fact that *Watt* was written in 1942-44 and the first "new novel," Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes,* did not appear until 1953. *Watt* also was first published in 1953; the independence with which two original writers developed such similar devices is indicated by the

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fact that Robbe-Grillet began writing *Les Gommes* in 1951. By the end of World War II, French writers had assimilated the innovations of Joyce, of Proust, of Kafka, of Faulkner and Dos Passos, sufficiently to use them as bases for further experimentation in the refinement of technique. Thus the development of the "new novel" has been a natural growth, quite naturally producing three different species.

And of course it has brought forth imitators with their imitations. Most of these are not worth discussing, because they never had anything of their own—Claude Mauriac, for example, is a popular imitator of Butor, nothing more; but let us consider what happens when a writer with a talent of his own gives it up for the easier rewards of imitating something fashionable. The falling off is very clear in the sequence of four unrelated novels by Robert Pinget, *Graal Flibuste* (1956), *Baga* (1958), *Le Fiston* (1959, translated as *Monsieur Levert,* 1961), and *Clope au dossier* (1961).

Graal Flibuste has a consistent elegance of style and a broken elegance of structure that entirely suit its material. It begins in a traditional genre, the narrative of a journey, and slips from time to time into another traditional genre, the collection of tales told to beguile a journey; encompassing both is a third traditional genre, the narrative of a dream. The dreamer, however, does not wake—at least, we can't say so with any certitude; the journey does not end or reach a destination; the novel just arbitrarily stops. In formal terms this is negligent, but in terms of realism it is valid, since the dream is that of a drunk who has passed out with his head on a table; there is in fact no contradiction, since the drunk, though he may well sink below the level of dreams into complete unconsciousness, or may perhaps wake up rather than face what a deeper depth of the subconscious is about to bring forth, or may even die for the same reason, is in any case not a stupid man but one quite capable of having such an urbane and witty dream as far as it goes. His performance is largely conventional but altogether brilliant in its kind: the nameless narrator is a product of the ideal European bourgeois culture—humane, tolerant, skeptical and epicurean—and his coachman, Brindon, a noseless giant who is all too obviously Death, is in spite of everything not an unpleasant companion. Brindon's character is quite clearly drawn: he is literal-minded, humorless, predictably conventional in his

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attitudes, impervious to new ideas, and incapable of having new experiences. He doesn't consciously reject new dishes, but—if you'll pardon my putting it this way—when he eats phoenix he thinks he's eating chicken. Whatever rare fantastic sights may meet his eye, whatever uniquely delightful sounds may touch his ear, whatever gaily subtle thoughts may be presented to his mind, he helplessly reduces to banality. Everything he touches turns to plastic. And even so, since he doesn't presume to judge what he doesn't understand or to condemn what he doesn't enjoy, since he regards the pleasures of his employer with simple puzzlement rather than dogmatic disapproval, and since above all he is friendly and pleasant, we find him not so illiberal as he might be: we respect his nature as he respects ours: we even like him. Thus we have two projections of the dreamer's nature, closer and more harmonious than Don Quixote and Sancho Panza; the smaller angle between their lines of vision affords us a more delicate understanding of their souls' adventures.

And what strange adventures! Their horse, Clotho, who likes to travel, pulls them at his own will through swamps, deserts, forests, prairies, mountains and cities. His name is obviously a clue, and the fact that it doesn't fit his sex is another. He is as amiable as Brindon, and when he deigns to talk shows a much more sophisticated intelligence. His perceptiveness, in fact, is admirably set off by Brindon's horse sense. Most of the time, his passengers have the impression that it is they who determine the itinerary. However that may be, they go through a world of monstrously neurotic plants, animals, human beings, gods and demigods until they come to a beautiful somber plain; there they see, far away but overwhelming, a giant gate, a triumphal arch of gold inlaid with enamels, reaching to Heaven. They dimly discern a city beyond it, but as they approach it, awe-struck, terrified, fascinated and delighted, the book ends.

What we have here is an old form adapted to modern sensibilities: for the form of *Graal Flibuste* is that of an old-fashioned episodic novel such as *Candide* or *Jurgen,* but its spirit is that of surrealism. If Pinget had continued to develop the possibilities of this method he might have done much more than revive and advance the techniques the quarreling surrealists unfortunately abandoned: he might have developed an individual talent.

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He has chosen instead to follow the current fashion, to be a "new novelist" and—whether intentionally or unintentionally—an imitator of Samuel Beckett, whose protégé he is. *Baga* is full of the same wit and verve that make *Graal Flibuste* more than a conventional exercise in self-conscious fantasy, but here they are only incidental to a monologue in the manner of *Molloy* or *Malone Dies,* without Beckett's structural perfection, stylistic brilliance or philosophic density; *Le Fiston* is even more abjectly imitative, for here Pinget abandons his natural gaiety as well as his natural form and does his poor best to match Beckett's magnificent gloom; and *Clope au dossier* is a pastiche of stylistic mannerisms from *The Unnamable* and *Comment c'est:* a clever imitation, but still an imitation.

"Abject discipleship," says James Feibleman, "is a betrayal of the master." It is also a betrayal of ourselves. The difference between originality and imitation is a moral difference. It is a matter of *literary* morality. Perhaps the chief value of the "new novelists" is their demonstration of the moral responsibility of literature to its own nature.

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ELENA CROCE

Notes on Italian Literature, 1960-63

FICTION RANKS FOREMOST in the ledger of Italian literature of the last three years. Probably this holds true for France and Germany also, but in Italy even a most summary balance sheet of recent fiction reveals developments that are impressive yet debatable. The first entry to meet the eye is still *The Leopard*. It appeared in 1958, before the period we are concerned with, and by now is familiar to readers throughout the world, so its intrinsic qualities need not be discussed here. Nor is there any need to re-evaluate Lampedusa; his few posthumous writings (*Two Stories and a Memory,* Pantheon) are fragments and drafts confirming the impression that he was indeed a one-book author who gave in a single major work all that he had to offer.

Yet publication of *The Leopard* must be our point of departure because, for more or less sociological reasons, extraneous to the book itself, it marked a step forward in the evolution of the novel in Italy today. It was our first best seller in the current meaning of the term. And it was a real best seller. Publicity artificially stimulated its later sales, but its initial success was genuinely spontaneous and was due to several interesting factors. Paradoxical as it may be, this book, which was written by a man who lived out of time and out of the modern world, awakened our writers—and our publishers even more—to the significance of a radically new social and cultural situation. It demonstrated the fact that the novel, a literary form which in Italy has traditionally attracted a few thousand readers at most, can count today on winning an immediate public of a hundred thousand or more.

The success of *The Leopard* inaugurated this basic change in the position of the Italian novelist vis-à-vis the public. Without question, it has been stimulating for our writers in so far as they are concerned with social realities and tend—as they do—to make the novel a vehicle for social comment. It may prove to be less so in the more personal and creative aspects of their work. The new Italian reading public is drawn from the equally new and even more numerous managerial class, and for the writer this happens to be a rather chilling audience. As a group, it is suspected of having no genuine, vital involvement with literature but of aspiring to a pseudo-culture, which it considers a status symbol. Furthermore, the publicity apparatus with which publishers now boast they can sell anything is no less forbidding. A book can be boring, it can be incomprehensible—no matter, so long as it meets certain fixed prerequisites. These are a kind of sophistication and novelty so rigidly and snobbishly conceived that an author is scarcely allowed to be himself; in this sense, he may be a current but scarcely a living writer.

These depressing realities of the literary marketplace closely resemble

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conditions that are deplored in other countries, of course; in Italy they are actually secondary. What chiefly matters is something else: our novelists are challenged by this new situation; it is putting their creative energy to a rigorous test that will require them, sooner or later, to evolve new and more authentic values and a substantial clarification of purpose. All the recent experiments in fiction—particularly in the last three years—seem to be aiming in this direction. The fact that most have been abandoned before crystallizing into new novelistic formulas might appear at first glance to be a sign of uncertainty but it also indicates an unresigned restiveness. The experimenters may seem to be wandering up many blind alleys, but they do re-emerge and doughtily persevere. Their guiding motive is, still and always, the search for realism; that is, for the means whereby the artist may discover and capture the true face of a society that has been changing radically over a period of fifteen years, and in which the writer is profoundly disturbed—disturbed and unreconciled—that he is unable to recognize the place of man.

Italian culture, like others, is deeply engaged in the eternally unsolved romantic debate between the self and reality, but generalizations on this score would be pointless; suffice it to say that with us the debate is highly exacerbated. More specifically and narrowly, the Italian literary situation is this: for twenty years under Fascism, Italian literature was entrenched in an art for art's sake phase divorced from all social problems; in the early post-war period it found an escape and transition via so-called neorealism which, in the charged atmosphere of the liberation years, produced some happy results, although inevitably a rapid degeneration set in. Positive efforts to counteract this regression have been gathering strength, notably in the last three years. Writers have launched numerous experiments in reaction against fiction formulas that, no matter how modernized, were still those of the nineteenth century, and against a language of social protest that was still marked by romantic humanitarianism. As I suggested a moment ago, these experiments have had definite technical limitations and most have quickly worn themselves out, but for all that they may prove to have demolished the Medusa's head that paralyzes our own and other contemporary literature—the abstract realism that is perhaps the final stiffening of the artist's self when confronted by a reality he considers external and alien.

The experiments I speak of are to be understood in the same general sense as in the "new" French or German fiction, except that ours lag way behind in technical complexities. The Italian author, being more sceptical and also more modest than his German or French colleagues, envisages no such Cyclopean constructions or alchemic distillations as they undertake. And for another thing, the Italian reader, being much less diligent than his West European counterparts, is far too indolent to grapple with such material.

A small token of this is the homely tag given to a major group of

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our most advanced writers. Alberto Arbasino, an exceptionally gifted journalist and author, who is one of its members, has dubbed the group "the little grandsons of the Engineer." The Engineer in question is Carlo Emilio Gadda. Following publication of his *Pasticciaccio brutto de Via Merulana* ("The Imbroglio of Via Merulana"), Gadda has been definitely acknowledged as a foremost figure of Italian literature today, although he maintains the aristocratic mien of the outsider and, having spent his early life building bridges and roads, is one of those anomalies called the "Sunday artist."

So, the most outstanding "new" group in Italian fiction presents itself in the familiar guise of the clan headed by its patriarch—except that the Engineer refuses to acknowledge his offspring. In fact, he seems quite wary of these self-styled disciples and disowns them as ruthlessly as only a gentleman of the old school, whose manners are old-fashioned and elaborately courteous, possibly could. The grandsons are numerous indeed, for many young writers, realizing that a central problem for them is one of language, have been fascinated by the evocative rather than realistic power of Gadda's, which is a blend of classic Italian and dialect. Let me say at once that Gadda is an eccentric, an instinctive writer whose language, far from being experimental, is the finished product of a personal style, and it is more than natural that such an artist should feel totally alien to the technical preoccupations and experimentalism of his imitators. Yet this is not to say that the experimentalism itself is without interest. The way in which various young writers have made use of the Engineer's example (even if perhaps they have misunderstood him) testifies to their seriousness in looking for the highroad—which is, I repeat, language—that will lead them from the quicksands of traditional realism, where the more one struggles to escape, the more deeply one is mired down.

My allusions to the experimental preoccupations of Gadda's disowned descendants more or less imply that their efforts have not got beyond the searching stage. It is a lively and vigorous search, and the Gaddians grow daily in number, the most recent one being Luciano Bianciardi (an American edition of his *The Bitter Life* is scheduled for 1964), but they have yet to achieve real results.

Arbasino, who so uncompromisingly styled himself a Gadda grandson, is considered one of our most brilliant young writers not so much on the basis of his Gaddian novel *L'Anonimo Lombardo* ("The Anonymous Lombard") as for his travel book *Parigi o Cara* ("You Lovely Paris"), his trenchant gifts as a social commentator, and the series of pungent profiles in which he has dealt quite blisteringly with personalities in the art world, among them the film directors Luchino Visconti and Antonioni.

Another writer in this group, who is also from Lombardy and also addicted to dialect, is Giovanni Testori; he has published four books since 1959, one of which, *The House in Milan,* has appeared in English

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(Harcourt, Brace & World).[1] Testori was quite widely acclaimed at first, but his later books have shown no particular growth.

The man who is not only the most gifted of Gadda's disciples but an example of such multiple talents as we have not seen recently in Italian literature, seems to be facing an especially uncertain road. Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote both his first and second novels (*Ragazzi di Vita* and *Una vita violenta*) in a Roman dialect which is not only an acquired language (Pasolini's native dialect is Friulian) but is a distinct vernacular spoken in the *borgate,* or slums, of Rome. Here I must digress to say that the *borgate* do not constitute Rome, for all that they are the notorious social "wound" of the city, having come into existence during the war, when refugees from all over Italy crowded into the capital. To speak the vernacular of the Roman *borgate,* then, means to speak a slang peculiar to the capital city and influenced by the jargon of the underworld with which the slum-dwellers live side by side. The choice of such specialized language amounts in itself to a literary program, and Pasolini made his humanitarian, socially polemical intent even sharper in his second novel. It has very fine passages, and also a more profound psychological insight into the theme of adolescence (the adolescent world identified with homosexuality are two leitmotifs of Pasolini's work), yet *La vita violenta,* like his first book, is vitiated by aesthetic acrobatics on one hand and on the other by a sentimentality in which the social protest with its vaguely Marxist overtones—an important part of the author's intent—is lost. The sentimentality we encounter here is a typical manifestation of the "mama's boy" complex, which psychoanalysts have singled out as the great Italian neurosis. (It was the target of an enormously artful satire by that great Roman comedian Alberto Sordi.) Pasolini seems rather disarmingly unaware of foundering in this sentimentality, which afflicts his last book of poetry as well. However, he is an exceptionally talented craftsman—in poetry, fiction, philology, and film-making—and in *La religione del mio tempo* he has attempted stylistic and metrical innovations of far greater interest than anything we have seen lately in the field of Italian verse.

A characteristic restlessness leads Pasolini in search of new fields, and in his most recent transformation he has become one of our most active film directors. Again we meet the same aestheticism and sentimentality, the same inconsequential social protest, and—for example, in his last film, *Mamma Roma*—an increasingly precious emphasis on dialect, which here stands revealed as essentially an evasion of the reality that its use was intended to express.

Among other authors for whom Gadda has been a formative influence we must count Lucio Mastronardi, whose first novel, *Maestro di Vigevano* ("The Vigevano Schoolteacher"), established him as a literary man while giving an autobiographical clue to his original profession.

[1] His other books are *I segreti di Milano, La gilda del MacMahon,* and *La Maria Brasca.*

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In relation to writers already mentioned, Mastronardi has followed a reverse course, for he moved not from literature to dialect but from dialect to literature. His first novel is the opening book in a Vigevano series,[2] placed in a small city in Lombardy. His work qualifies as still another experiment in realism not only because of language but because of his sociological point of view. Mastronardi attempts to posit the problem of individual maladjustment in the context of Italy's new social order. As social comment, however, this is not projected in traditionally Leftist terms—in the class struggle, that is—but centers on the organizational conformism of today's neocapitalism. Mastronardi portrays this society and its impoverished human values in the microcosm of the elementary school and provincial life, and does so with a chill albeit humorous vividness that is indeed effective. His version of what the sociological novel can be has, to this point, won a larger following than any other.

A similar novel by Giuseppe Cassieri, *Il Calcinaccio* ("The Flaking Plaster"), has also aroused interest. Cassieri deals with the private rather than public school (in this the two books reflect a major controversial issue now facing the country). However, if Mastronardi's hero is satirically presented as a terrible teacher—which probably won him considerable reader sympathy—Cassieri's is a dedicated man who earnestly wants to be a good teacher, although his good intentions are not particularly persuasive.

And then there is Paolo Volponi's ambitious *Memoriale,* which has been purely a critical—but a considerable critical—success, by an author who had heretofore made his graceful appearance on the literary scene as a poet. His first novel deals with the worker confronted by the phenomenon of an employer who is no longer the traditional enemy but who cares for his employee's security and welfare—even more solicitously than the man would like—yet at the same time deprives him of his obscure, unexpressed hunger for personal dignity. Mastronardi's book arouses our interest chiefly by the psychopathic personality it presents, whereas Volponi's novel can be considered the most serious effort made so far to attain a fictional realism based on sociological awareness. But even this category of fiction—like the work of Gadda's disciples, which centers on questions of language—has still to achieve solid and substantial results.

This is a very summary account indeed of the relative positions of what we may call the outposts ("Avantgarde" has now such a definite historical connotation that I cannot find it appropriate for our writers today) of Italian fiction and of the writers who are its newest recruits. We can now turn back, inevitably with a sense of relief, to authors who are more mature in age or experience, and who can, for better or worse, be evaluated in terms of more objective achievement.

[2]At least two others are in various stages of writing or publication, tentatively titled "The Shoemaker of Vigevano" and "The Working Man of Vigevano."

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In the case of these people, one cannot speak of group tendencies but rather of an individual search that may now and then reveal the author's impulse to affiliate with the modern classical tradition. And so we find what I might call conservative innovations—conservative in that the authors adopt the structure and language of the early twentieth-century novel, and innovations only in the sense that our writers produced no such novels during that period. For the sake of clarity, one must always emphasize the fact that in Italy the modern novel did not appear until the end of the Second World War, and that it is almost without local precedent in the earlier part of the century. In this sense, the two most notable works of recent years have been written by artists who could scarcely be of more diverse temperament and taste; both, however, are definitely committed to what is approximately termed neoclassicism, and both achieve a high level of formal excellence.

In point of time, the first is Raffaele La Capria's *The Mortal Wound* (Farrar, Straus & Co., January 1964) and the second, Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini* (Atheneum, 1964). Both novels have been top literary successes in Italy and deserve a critical assessment that space does not allow. Let me simply point out their more salient characteristics. La Capria's novel combines a structure reminiscent of Virginia Woolf with dialogue that would do no discredit to Ivy Compton-Burnett. Because the book is not a latter-day imitation but a genuine and individual experiment, this paradoxical combination works out perfectly. Both in its content and remarkable style, the book is most original. The theme is the hero's tormented love for a woman, a love which mirrors the more profound love-hate he feels for his city—that singular city which is Naples. Perhaps no one has ever succeeded like La Capria in pinpointing the typically Neapolitan schism between an inveterate propensity for uncontrolled sentimental abandon and an ironic, critical temper that gives and asks no quarter.

Bassani's novel, on the other hand, is descended not from the English but from the Middle European tradition. The author explicitly proposes, in fact, to turn backward and write the kind of novel that, during the period between the two wars, Fascism did not allow to be written—that is, the novel of ideas in the manner of Thomas Mann—while more instinctively he reverts to the psychological bent of the great Triestino novelist Italo Svevo. Bassani essays, at the same time, the ultramodern method of identifying reality—plucking it from a closed, familiar, and particularized world in which everything is fixed and precise. Bassani—who is himself a Jew and a native of Ferrara—offers us in this novel a fascinating reconstruction of a once highly distinctive society that has vanished—that of the upper-middle-class Ferrarese Jews.

There is little need to report here on an internationally known author like Moravia. Suffice it to say that he remains remarkably con-

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sistent, in good ways as in bad. Moravia is always a highly skillful and robust storyteller, master of a lucid and fluent prose. He has always been widely read in Italy and *The Empty Canvas* (Farrar, Straus & Co.) was one of our most discussed recent novels. If no one could own up to having really liked it, it certainly was no part of the author's intention that he should. Moravia has the gift of being able to tell in a more or less humanly—and therefore poetically—convincing way (or, as some say, in a decently "ascetic" way) stories primarily concerned with sex. In Italian this is very difficult, for here we come up against the old problem of language. Literary Italian is at once too academic and too naturalistic, and the question is to find a suitable mode of expression that will be adequate but not too accented. Moravia is unique in this; his impersonal, ascetic tone enables him to write unconstrainedly and at length about the sexual experiences of his characters. The other alternative is, of course, to take refuge in folklore, and fascination with its enormously rich, off-color vocabulary is not the least of the reasons that have drawn writers of the Gadda school to dialect. It may seem paradoxical but this, too, is a way of artfully handling reality, for the more vivid and outsized the crude words are, the more innocent and innocuous they become.

To return to specific writers who have been producing individual and substantial work over a period of time: almost all our more representative authors have given interesting evidence of growth, with the exception of Italo Calvino who, since terminating his series of fables with *The Non-Existent Knight* (Random House), seems to have withdrawn into some private meditation.

Cassola has remained faithful to neorealism. *Bebo's Girl* (Pantheon) is an admirably realized novel in which he continues with his Resistance themes but keeps to the fore the emotional conflict of a woman torn between love and a protective maternal instinct that finally prevails. In human terms, the book is very persuasive, even if somewhat attitudinized in a conventional nineteenth-century manner. The Italian reader, mindful of the state of Italian fiction, is led to ask himself whether we really have overcome the moral and psychological dilemma inherited from our nineteenth-century forebears, or whether there is not still a definite need to clarify it. This is, in any case, the problem to which Cassola addresses himself; in his last and somewhat less successful novel, *Un Cuore Arido* ("An Arid Heart"), he attempts in an ingenuous but most forthright fashion to deal with the emotional problem his title suggests.

A recent recruit to the (by now rather venerable) neorealistic school is Mario Tobino. In *Il Clandestino* (Doubleday, 1964), Tobino has abandoned the elegance and pungency of his rather mannered Tuscan style to write a novel about life among the partisans, which abounds in lofty intentions but lacks, unfortunately, narrative vigor.

By way of contrast, Mario Soldati has written a delicious collection

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of short stories he has titled *Storie di spettri.* One of our most dispersive artists—and he is that—Soldati goes on writing books and films, appears in the theatre as an actor and on TV as a commentator, and even sings, no less. To call this a collection of ghost stories is utterly incongruous, for it would be hard to find anyone less inclined to share a taste, such as the British, for the supernatural. Soldati's impulse is to caricature the magician who produces rabbits out of hats or keeps a false-bottomed trunk handy for the lady who is to be sawed in two. He is a widely cultivated man who in his youth was among the first of Italian authors to respond to the English and American literature of the twenties and thirties, yet as he has matured he has definitely opted for a personal neoromanticism that goes back directly to Flaubert, if not to De Maistre. The fascinating element in these recent stories is not their ghosts but a subtle autobiographical line that is discreetly threaded through the tales, and the strange atmosphere that Soldati alone—so far, at least—has managed to evoke of Piedmont, a curious region of Italy that is almost as unknown to us as to the foreign tourist.

The further one moves into this present-day fictional landscape the more vistas appear that one would want to examine more closely. There is, for example, Natalia Ginsburg, whose most recent novel is *Voices in the Evening* (Dutton). Faithful to her own style, which lies between the enchanted and the grotesque, in some ways Miss Ginsburg is the one disciple of the one great and truly modern writer of fiction to have appeared in Italy between the two world wars—I mean, of course, Cesare Pavese. I think this is a valid observation if it is taken in the widest sense, for there is no temperamental affinity between these two artists. . . . The dean of Italian novelists, Riccardo Bacchelli, has published a novel on a Franciscan theme (*Non ti chiamerò più padre*—"No Longer Will I Call Thee Father") that deserves a whole chapter to itself if only for the richness and complexity of culture and the historical awareness that it reflects. . . . Another chapter would be owed the only novel written by our most famous historian and critic of the theater, Silvio d'Amico. *Le finestre di Piazza Navona* appeared, like *The Leopard,* posthumously. Less novel than memoir, it is the masked history of a family. The d'Amicos belonged to the "black" or papal bourgeoisie; Silvio d'Amico himself was one of the genuine lovers and connoisseurs of Rome, and his book is one of the best keys ever provided to a Rome that few people have ever known —the city as it was in the early years of Italian unification.

There is no time to do more than mention, from among our more thoughtful and serious women authors, Lalla Romano, whose most recent novel is *L'Uomo che parlava da solo* ("The Man Who Talked to Himself"). . . . Or to do more than cite Giovanni Arpino's last book, *A Crime of Honor* (Braziller). Earlier, Arpino had delighted his Italian readers with *The Novice* (Braziller), in which he achieved only the happiest effects—like curtains starched and white against a beautiful,

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gray northern landscape. He aroused general disaffection with this last one, a semi-detective, semi-pornographic thriller, which is perhaps our most spectacular example of hack writing from an author of talent.

We move to the other extreme with Elemirè Zolla's *Cecilia o la Disattenzione* ("A Matter of Inadvertence"). The elements of satiric and sociological realism on which this novel is based are rendered with personal, penetrating, and even hypercultivated taste. . . . And lastly, I come to a young author whose formative years were spent in America. Angela Bianchini has studied modern American fiction thoroughly, not only as a college student but as the proficient literary critic she has become. Under the title *Lungo Equinoxio* ("The Long Equinox"), she has published three quite successful short stories that are closely related. They deal variously with her return home after the fall of Fascism; with her rediscovery of Italy in the light of pre-war memories; and with her experience of maturing in an American milieu.

The element of memory, which is such a lively concern of many contemporary Italian writers, is a response to a deep-lying demand of our period, but for us it is something new. Biographies and memoirs, as literary genres, have been frankly slighted by Italian authors and public alike. Now, suddenly, they are showing a significant vitality, and at the same time we find a hybrid narrative, a combination of personal and historical experience, which in some cases—as in Michele Pantaleoni's book on the Mafia—makes more fascinating reading than any fiction. Yet the novel remains predominant in Italy, where it enjoys the advantage of being conceived in a new and fresh form, and so it has preëmpted our attention here. Mention must be made, however, of Ignazio Silone's recent publication of his important "dialogue" and of essayists like Zolla and Pietro Citati, not to overlook a more specialized practitioner like Giovanni Macchia. Here we approach an area in literature that is not accessible—nor is there any reason why it should be—to the public at large, and to consider this field of scholarly writing would lead us into an altogether different and more complex discussion.

[*Translated by Adrienne Foulke*]

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NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Fellini's "8½"; Holland's "11"

TOO MANY YEARS AGO, in school, our English teacher would occasionally ask us to write a composition "on any topic you choose." Inevitably, one or more unfortunate adolescents would turn up with "On Choosing a Topic," "How I Wrote This Composition," "On Writing a Theme for Mr. Chalkdust," papers which ached of indecision and badgered parents and endlessly sharpened pencils. Fellini's latest film[1] elevates the schoolboy dodge to a fine—or fairly fine—art. *8½* is about Fellini's troubles making *8½*. That is, Fellini has made six feature-length films, three shorts (counted at a half per), and this is literally *8½*. By the same system, we can—and shall—call this review "11," because I, too, would like to be autobiographical, though somewhat more covertly.

At the time of *La Dolce Vita* (in Holland's "8"), I concluded:

> The film, then, uses its two central images, sight and sound, to set off men against women. The women are goddesses, mythical, unreal *belles dames sans merci,* the sight of whom bewitches men into a kingdom of improvisation and illusion. Man is impotent, helpless . . . and abject before the gorgon-like, all-powerful image of woman. . . .[2]

The proof of that particular pudding came with the first press releases on Fellini's contribution to *Boccaccio 70.* The "all-powerful image of woman" had become forty feet of Anita Ekberg stepping down from a billboard to offer on the one hand permission, forgiveness, sex, and milk, on the other to torment the puritanical Dr. Antonio, a one-man vice squad waving his puny umbrella against those mighty breasts. In both *La Dolce Vita* and *The Temptation of Dr. Antonio,* Fellini put his fantasies about woman in the service of condemning morally those who cannot accept *mutterrecht* and the matriarchal stance. In *8½*, however, he has used his fantasies raw to express his own problems as a director.

8½ weaves three strands together: Fellini's professional life in making *8½*; his personal life with wife, mistress, and friends; and, binding the other two together, his inner life of dreams and fantasies. This is the latest version of Fellini's concern and preoccupation "with dehumanizing people, making them into things *(Cabiria)* or heroes *(La Strada)* or gods *(The White Sheik),* but in every case dehumanizing

[1] *8½*. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, and Brunello Rondi. Music by Nino Rota. Directed by Sr. Fellini and produced by Angelo Rizzoli. From the huge and expert cast, Anouk Aimée as the wife stands out.

[2] "The Follies Fellini," *Hudson Review,* XIV (1961), 425-431.

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them, making them into images" (again, Holland's "8"). In *La Dolce Vita,* Fellini turned his characters into the contrasty stills you would see in a photo mag; in *Boccaccio 70,* his characters became a caricature and a forty-foot billboard. In *8½*, his characters become merely versions of his own interior fantasy life. The men, it turns out (not unsurprisingly), are all derivatives of his father, associated with his own efforts to "rise" professionally and monetarily and his fears that he will be pulled down to earth by moral or intellectual criticism and so suffocated or drowned in a sea of talk or buried in the blackness of a dark screen. Women are white, associated with maternal love, healing, and forgiveness; they are also to be looked and lusted at.

The film opens with a dark, black dream sequence. The hero is stuck in a silent traffic jam, locked in his black car, staring at the people in the surrounding cars and they at him. He begins to suffocate (later in the film he will speak of "strangling in his own emotions"). He crawls out the top of the car and floats off into the sky, like the Christ at the opening of *La Dolce Vita,* but then he is pulled down like a kite by two men and he falls into the sea.

He wakes up at a spa where he is "taking the cure," that is, making a film, and we first see his face at this point, as though his very identity grew out of this therapy. (Marcello Mastroianni is Fellini's face in the film and Guido Anselmi his name—a combination of a poet and a painter, both of women.) At the spa, he has his first healing sight, a fantasy of a beautiful girl, "young yet ancient" (he later tells us), offering him a glass of purifying water. The vision stands as a moment of silence in an otherwise frightful rout of noise from a bilious band, chatter, and middle-aged (to put it charitably) women and priests peeping into the camera. To look at is better than to be looked at, and sight is better than sound. Sound embodies the criticisms of his collaborator on the script, who now appears, and from whom Guido turns to find an old crony being rejuvenated by his young mistress, Gloria. Elfin and existentialist, a daughter to this father, she is attuned to flowers, and she inspires Guido to go to the station and meet his own mistress, Carla, as she arrives at the spa.

As preoccupied with clothes and chatter as the fey Gloria was with nature, Carla pops into bed with Guido, after he has gotten her to make up as a prostitute, parade herself, show him her body, and generally bestow on him "the gorgon-like, all-powerful image of woman." His subsequent sleep is troubled by a dream that develops the father-strand of his current life. He turns (in the dream) from his loving mother to his mild father who wants his tomb built higher, who frets with the producer about his son's "failure" and tries to drag him into the ground. Guido turns to his mother, but she has been transformed into Luisa, his wife. Men, in this as in other Fellini films, try to rise, but sink down, grow old and die; women offer life.

Life at the spa means going to the wretched evening entertainment

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with the producer, his mistress, an interviewing journalist, various functionaries, fairies, and friends, notably the old-friend-and-young-mistress—now she is preoccupied with the almost inaudible "happy waters" bubbling under the ground. As the evening itself bubbles into a stream of empty chatter, the climax of the program comes: a satanic or Death-like telepathist (another old friend of Guido's) and his mind-reading lady. Readers, not of bodies like a film director, but of minds, they elicit from most of their subjects words. Not so Guido—they get from him a series of nonsense-syllables (again, downgrading words) and another dream-sequence.

Loving and seductive Mama scoops up her darling Guido (a boy again) and carries him into a vat for "a bath" with the other children screaming and squealing as they trample the grapes. In effect, he plays Dionysus to his mother's love-goddess, but as he goes to sleep his sister tells him the magic nonsense-syllables to make the eyes of his tomcat grandfather's portrait seek out a buried treasure—a capsule statement of the film's male principles: looking, lust, verbal knowledge, and money.

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, Guido ogles a real woman gently murmuring, "I forgive" into a telephone, but instead he gets the fake woman: an indefatigable French actress trying to find out about her "part." Guido retreats to "the production office," a helter-skelter of photographs of girls, drawing-boards, a mock-up for the new picture's space ship, one irretrievable lecher in bed with two whores, and an old man who complains about growing old (throughout the picture, like Guido's father in the dream, he tries to make Guido fail).

Guido goes to bed, where he has another healing vision of the "young yet ancient" girl, now a chambermaid who seduces him as he lies on a mound of photos of actresses. She laughs at the words of men in books and murmurs that she wants "to create order, cleanliness"—precisely Guido's problem and a chambermaid would seem to be just the one to solve it for him.

Unfortunately, his producer insists that he talk to a Cardinal for guidance on the film. The Cardinal, however, speaks only of a bird's sobs for Christ, while Guido, staring at a peasant woman, lapses into another dream. He is a schoolboy again, resorting to a grand, grotesque mound of a prostitute-by-the-sea, who puts on an hilarious rumba for her enthralled pre-teen audience. The priest from school comes and hales Guido off to punishment and shame (in handsome patterns of black and white)—but the boy eventually returns to his first love anyway. ("Is this to be a film about the Catholic conscience in Italy?" the journalist had asked.)

Guido next turns up in a Dantesque sequence where all the characters, wrapped up in sheets, descend to the inferno of the steam-rooms (men and women separated). He is summoned again to see the Cardinal in his steam bath (earlier some ecclesiastical functionary had said he

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could not make a movie in which the hero meets a cardinal in a mud bath). This time the Cardinal can only urge Guido to remind himself, "Outside the Church, there is no salvation," the words of Origen (whose two principal achievements, as I remember them, were allegorizing the Song of Songs and castrating himself).

When Guido flees again, he finds his wife, and for a brief time they are happy and loving until the producer insists on taking the whole crowd out to the fake launching-pad he has had built for Guido's picture—though Guido as of this moment has not the slightest idea of script, cast, or theme for the film. The huge network of beams in the gantry seems to represent an expensive superstructure of lies, the intellectual superstructure that is about to be erected on Guido's movie, and also the lies he has told his wife. Indeed, when they go to bed that night, they fight bitterly over Guido's deceptions.

The next morning, the fight continues when Guido's mistress turns up at the café where they are breakfasting. Guido retreats into the sixth and most famous dream-sequence, the harem scene. He returns home on the Feast of the Epiphany (!) to a house like his mother's where all his women live as houris running about in the steam-bath sheets, loving him, never jealous of one another, always peaceful, submissive. They greet him with joy as he gives presents all around to Gloria, Carla, the great, gross prostitute of his childhood, the mysterious, majestic "I forgive" lady, and so on. His wife returns the favor by presenting him with a new Negro girl whom he had admired. They bathe him, bundle him up in sheets as his mother had done (she's there, too), and all is tranquility until his first actress objects to being sent upstairs where the ladies who are "too old" are kept. A great hue and cry follows with the ladies insisting in the best Restoration manner that they should be loved until they are seventy. Finally Guido lays about him with a long bull whip—to their great delight: "He's like this every night." His wife restores peace, Guido makes an after-dinner speech, and she resumes scrubbing the floor.

He awakens into a viewing of all the screen tests, old and new, of the actresses he has interviewed for this new film (a kind of celluloid harem), and in a little after-piece to the harem dream, he has the wordy writer who has been criticizing his script hanged. From this point on, Fellini's movie takes a unique turn—the movie creates itself as it goes. The screen tests show women working out as actresses events we have already seen that could not possibly have been filmed previously—words spoken in momentary passion by Guido's wife or mistress, his own fantasy of the gross prostitute, and so on. At the same time, as Guido repeats the lines to the screen, they constitute a dialogue with his wife a few rows in front of him. In a manner madly Proustian, the barriers between art and life fall down. To some extent, the film has already been doing this —we knew about meeting the Cardinal in the mudbath before Guido did meet him there (or was it a steam bath?). The launching pad is

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just as tenuously connected to $8\frac{1}{2}$ as to the picture Guido is ostensibly making.

The screen tests end when Claudia Cardinale, in her very proper person, appears—she is the girl he has dreamed of as the "young but ancient" chambermaid in the healing visions, and he now wants her to play the part. She seems a far cry from the earlier, masculine *cardinale* with his puritanical strictures, as she insists that the trouble with the man in the film (who is, of course, Guido and Fellini) is not his lack of religiosity, but his inability to love. Yet, when Guido confesses there is as yet neither part nor film, she accuses him of betraying her (his Muse?) and leaves.

The producer bulldozes Guido into a huge party at the launching-pad to celebrate the start of shooting on his film (as yet neither cast nor scripted), and baffled by the jabber and squawk of the word-mongering journalists ("He has nothing to say," shrills one), Guido crawls under the table (as he did to escape his mother's dunking him in the wine) and blows his brains out with a revolver thoughtfully provided him by a public-relations man. After this self-sacrifice, his wife comes to him (apparently in dream, but the usual boundaries are utterly blurred at this point). Guido makes a very hammy Tennessee-Williams-like speech to her about love and giving oneself, but surely if Fellini has any taste at all, this is parodied by what follows: the most moving of the dream-sequences and the high point of the picture.

All the characters from his dreams and fantasies, father, mother, mistress, wife, prostitute, emerge in the same white as the girl of the healing vision. They are somehow purified, brought to order (by the whipping? the screen test? the death and rebirth?). A clown band appears, led by a little boy, and the Death-like mind-reader forms the characters into a line of march like a *Todtentanz*. Then down from the top of the launching-gantry pour all the minor and major characters of the film (earlier, the producer had complained about the cost of all these extras). The mind-reader forms them into a long line (though the Cardinal is excused) and they begin to dance along in time to the grotesque blaring music, round and round the launching-pad. As the darkness falls, they disappear, and one by one the members of the band take their leave, save only the exquisitely evocative little boy, looking like a toy policeman in his white uniform, playing his flute like a tiny Orpheus, the purified director of it all, ordering the disordered personages of a disorderly mind into images of cleanliness, light, and innocent acceptance. Fade out, and against the black screen appear the characters' names, white still, and finally the great baroque $8\frac{1}{2}$ in white lines against the black background.

To Mr. Bosley Crowther, all this "subtly travesties Freud," but surely all this is neither subtle nor a travesty. One could scarcely ask for a more explicit working-out of the classical psychoanalytic view of creativity: "A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative

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writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfillment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory" (Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," 1908). Fellini seems to have followed this description like a recipe, but $8\frac{1}{2}$ fails or, at least, falls short of *Cabiria* or *La Strada* or *La Dolce Vita*. Why?

As so often in the arts, it is the near-misses that tell us most about the artist and seduce the critic into generalizations—in this case, since Fellini and I are being self-conscious, generalizations about the uses of psychoanalysis for aesthetic evaluation. It has always seemed to me crass in the extreme to analyze the personality of a living artist, but in this case it is Fellini himself who has opened the Pandora's box of his psyche and leaked his fantasies and his infancy out in front of us. We can start with the hat that Guido-Fellini wears throughout $8\frac{1}{2}$. "You dress like an old man—that hat!" complains one of the girls. And it is indeed black, death-like, old-fashioned, cerebral—as Fellini's men are.

His basic theme is man against woman. Man, he senses as essentially passive, impotent, and dying, but in spite of it concerned with "rising" to the top (like a hat) in terms of money, profession, religion, words. Man is concerned with words at the expense of the really important thing: the image of woman's face and body offering the white drink of life (contrast the two *cardinali*). Fellini degrades sound in his films, turning it either into raucous music or meaningless jabber: it is not too difficult to guess that he is working out a wish to return to a pre-verbal life consisting mostly of looking at mother, taking her in, so to speak. Fellini seems to be saying that to use words (a script, for example) is to grow old and die—hence his improvisatory style of filming.

At the same time, to improvise means (in $8\frac{1}{2}$) to experience directly the sources of inspiration, to be passive and femininely receptive to the old world within. There are risks involved in such passivity—or so we can guess from his picture of men, dying and impotent, or the way he portrays his mother (in $8\frac{1}{2}$). She seems seductive in the extreme, a woman who would have been quite overpowering to a small boy, and perhaps this is why he represents danger in the nightmare sequence as being suffocated, overwhelmed, or drowned: one could be trapped in that old world within and without. Thus, he approaches this feminine world gingerly, by being casual and improvisatory. Guido-Fellini asks, for example, his mistress to pretend he is a stranger into whose room she has accidentally blundered. And one keeps one's distance. Woman may be the source of sustenance and life, but she is better approached when she is a little dehumanized—into an image, something a man can master and control, even multiply, if need be. Further, looking at something presupposes a certain distance: if you can see a thing, you know you haven't been engulfed by it; if you see only blackness, you may

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have been. So don't eat—just look. And even then, don't look all the time. You must look away to be sure you still can tear yourself away, and perhaps this "need to look away" is the key to the curiously episodic structure of Fellini's films, which skip along from one episode to the next with gaps and blanks between. As for the images themselves, black things (like that hat) seem to suggest imageless, masculine thought, also darkness clothing and obliterating the self; while a white, high-key screen suggests a body—even a world—made clean and orderly or feminized.

Fellini's last three (or $2\frac{1}{2}$) films all build on the same images, all draw on the same infantile material, and the two feature-length films, at least, show a striking similarity in style and pace. Yet, if I may hypostatize my judgment, *La Dolce Vita* clearly outshines the other two. Why?

Freud, in that essay which seems peculiarly apposite to Fellini's films, stresses the importance of the writer's softening the egoistic character of his fantasies so as to overcome "the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others." Fellini has done anything but soften in $8\frac{1}{2}$, and we could say that it is the weakest of the three because it is so autobiographical. But, after all, autobiography can be fun, and the most exquisite moments in $8\frac{1}{2}$ are the most intensely autobiographical, those like the screen-tests sequence, in which making a film and living adult life and remembering childhood all flow into a single image on the screen. The trouble seems to come from another quarter—moral and intellectual content.

Fellini's last three films seem to me to rank in merit according to the amount of "meaning" in each. *La Dolce Vita* fairly reeked of "meaning," with its Christ-symbols, parallels to Dante, moral indictment of a contemporary life-style, and what not. The *Boccaccio 70* episode had its little fabulated moral. But $8\frac{1}{2}$ has little or no intellectual content. The difference shows in the very titles. *La Dolce Vita* evokes a moral tradition of some kind. *The Temptation of Dr. Antonio* (with its echo of "The Temptation of Saint Anthony") prepares us for religious allegory. But $8\frac{1}{2}$ drives us right back into Fellini's biography—you have to know he has made now, seven features plus three shorts.

But that would seem a painfully obvious conclusion: that, other things being equal, a film with a universal, abstractable meaning is better than one without. Matters are not so simple, though, for the problem is not in the message, but the "feel" of the films. For those of us who liked it at all, *La Dolce Vita* picked us up, swept us along, engaged us in a way that $8\frac{1}{2}$ for all its similarity in style and emotional content does not. Why should moral or intellectual content change our emotional involvement?

The neo-classical view took the literary arts (and I am including cinema) to be "sower pills of reprehension wrapt up in sweete words."

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The Fellini experience shows that just the opposite is true: "reprehension" somehow sugar-coats the words (or, in cinema, images). Paradoxical as this proposition may seem, it is clear enough in the case of the joke, humblest and best of models for more complex literary processes. A joke has to have a "point"—without one, the cleverest word-play fails to draw us in. Yet, clearly, when we laugh we are not just responding to editorial content. In the joke—and in art—meaning is not an end in itself, but a means to undo our defenses and open us to the pleasures of art.

Paradoxically, then, meaning of a quite cerebral and removed kind enables us to respond to an image in an old, deep, primitive, and quite unintellectual way. The dream sequences in $8\frac{1}{2}$ reach for that very "deep" response on our part, but they don't quite get it, while the same fantasies in *La Dolce Vita* strike us (me?) as richly evocative. They can get down to the very roots of my emotional life, not because the fantasies are different—they aren't—but because their environment is. The artist's promise of a moral or intellectual "point" bribes us (me) to take part in his (my) illicit fantasies. Without an intellectual superstructure, his personal fantasy fails to engage other persons; the joke lays an egg.

"I tell the story of one man," Fellini writes about $8\frac{1}{2}$. "I think it is completely useless to make a conscious attempt to tell the story of everybody, or to try to make statements of a moral nature." But is it? Isn't that the point of our excursion into psychoanalytic theory? Hypothesis: the relative success of two works of art based on the same unconscious content depends on the range of interaction up and down the whole gamut of the mind. *La Dolce Vita* used all 88 keys from infantile fantasy to parallels to Dante. $8\frac{1}{2}$ plays on three octaves in the middle, the poorer intellectually—and emotionally—for its lack of "higher" abstractable meaning.

It is no accident that Fellini who so downgrades words ran into trouble with verbal meaning. We could state his psychic configuration this way: to be my father is to repress and die; to have my mother is to live—but to be her. Words, he seems to associate with the father-side as repressive and killing; images seem to mean possessing—and being possessed by—woman. And Fellini's problem as a film-maker is to balance words and images. In the final scene of $8\frac{1}{2}$, he does it brilliantly: Fellini leads the male mind-reader who in turn leads the images in a dance, and he who plays the piper calls the tune. Evidently, Fellini used $8\frac{1}{2}$ (filmed behind locked doors) as some kind of therapy through a crisis of turning his creativity in a new direction. I hope it served him well, but, therapy aside, $8\frac{1}{2}$ itself stands as a fascinating but slightly painful set-piece "On Choosing a Topic."

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

WHAT IS STRIKING IN BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S MUSIC is the enormously resourceful craftsmanship that often operates in the place, and in the guise, of creativity—that in *The Rape of Lucretia* years ago produced a hubbub which was a mere going through the motions of musical activity, and that in *The Turn of the Screw* last year produced the unusual and unattractive modern-style instrumental and vocal sounds which for the most part had no expressive relation to the words and action. But I recall *Albert Herring* as one work in which Britten applied himself to the task of real invention for the situation, with brilliant results. And he did this again in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* which the New York City Opera produced last spring. With Peter Pears he skilfully reduced Shakespeare's play to a text for which he devised music that establishes the atmosphere of the scenes and gives clear shape and heightened expressive effect to the words. It does no more than this—as Wolf does no more in many of his songs; it is, then, music that wouldn't work interestingly by and for itself, as some of the music of *Albert Herring* did; but it works effectively with and for the play on its three levels: the unreal supernatural level of Oberon and Tytania (established by the counter-tenor voice of Oberon, the coloratura style of Tytania), the real human world of the lovers, the low-comedy level of the artisans. Text and music together make a brilliant theater piece—or one that is brilliant when it is staged and performed as well as it was by the New York City Opera, with Robert Fletcher's scenery and costumes as lighted by Jules Fisher, William Ball's direction, a group of principals among whom William McDonald, the Oberon, Spiro Malas, the Bottom, and Julian Miller, the Puck who spoke and danced but didn't sing, were outstanding, and Julius Rudel's conducting. For once the expenditure of talent, work and money was justified by the quality of the opera—something not true of Floyd's *Susannah,* Moore's *The Ballad of Baby Doe,* Weill's *Street Scene,* Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Menotti's *The Medium,* which the company also presented in its spring season of contemporary opera.

A lot of talent, work and money was wasted on the televised production of Menotti's newest opera, *Labyrinth,* by N.B.C. Opera Theater, which had commissioned it (and was similarly responsible for the earlier *Maria Golovin* and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*). The libretto of *Labyrinth* was the usual Menotti weirdie, concerned this time with what happened to a bride and groom wandering about in the corridors of a "grand hotel" in an unsuccessful search for their room, but with the difference this time that it came with new intellectual pretensions:

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before the performance we had Menotti himself, formerly content to deal on a realistic level with the predicaments of his twisted characters, but now the meditator on the human condition of life and death explaining the symbolic meaning of the surrealistic characters and happenings in *Labyrinth* with which he deluded himself that he was making like Kafka. And it turned out that the mind that had produced this intellectual rubbish had contrived for it the usual Menotti musical rubbish.

Bellini's last opera, *I Puritani,* rarely performed because of its formidable writing for the leading soprano and tenor, and last given in New York by the American Opera Society in 1954 with Laurel Hurley and Eugene Conley, was given again by the Society last spring with Joan Sutherland and Nicolai Gedda. The performance provided an opportunity to hear what beautiful writing Bellini had put into the work in addition to the best-known soprano aria *"Qui la voce"*—a notable example being the elaborate concluding ensemble of Act 1. And it also provided an opportunity to hear not only unusual singing by Sutherland but distinguished and occasionally sensational singing by Gedda. The lady behind me, catching sight of the special style of Sutherland's dress, exclaimed: "She must be pregnant!"; and this offered a possible explanation of the change in Sutherland's voice—an amplitude and glow in the vocal tone that it had never exhibited before. In addition the voice produced this time not the mannered moaning of little fragments that we had been getting from Sutherland recently but a real and sustained singing of long phrases. With the vocal beauty and style of these phrases, and the spectacular execution of florid passages, her singing was the most impressive I have heard her do. And hardly less impressive in its own way was Gedda's deployment in beautifully shaped phrases of the fine voice which took in stride—with almost no anticipatory sign of the effort involved—the sensational high D's that rang out clear and full. There was excellent singing also by the mezzo-soprano Betty Allen and the bass Justino Diaz; and Richard Bonynge, Sutherland's husband, conducted with authority and musical taste.

After curtain calls for Lynn Seymour and the other soloists of the Royal Ballet who had danced engagingly in a divertissement from Bournonville's *Napoli,* the curtain rose again for a pas de deux from his *Flower Festival at Genzano.* For a few moments the stage was empty; then a couple appeared at the back: Rudolf Nureyev escorting Merle Park to the center of the stage, where he released her and bowed deeply with a curving overhead sweep of the arm. It was something I had seen done many times—something that every dancer does well enough, a mere preliminary that may receive only half one's attention even when done by a good dancer; and it was almost over when I was suddenly aware that the mere flow of changing bodily configura-

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tion was extraordinary, and that with the aura of presence and style it was one of the most extraordinary things I had ever seen. And it sufficed to reveal what sets Nureyev apart from the other great male dancers known to most of us. Whether Karsavina did or did not say he was even greater than Nijinsky, anyone can see that Nureyev, on the stage, exercises—through his movements, through his mere presence when he is motionless—the kind of extraordinary compulsion we have been told Nijinsky exercised. It operates in even the quietest, the least of his movements; and it operated in those with which, in the opening adagio of the pas de deux, he created a heightening context for what Park did (very much as Franz Rupp's excitingly alive piano-playing creates a heightening context for the singing he is accompanying). In these movements he held one's fascinated attention legitimately, with the extraordinary way he did what the piece required him to do—not illegitimately, with anything done specifically to get attention. And the same was true of the breathtaking execution of the feats of virtuosity in his solo and in the coda.

So, a night later, with *Giselle*. For the *New Yorker's* Winthrop Sargeant, Nureyev came to life in this ballet only in his seemingly effortless execution of Albrecht's spectacular solo near the end: until then he had given the impression of being "merely a slim, decorative, graceful, and somewhat sulky young man." The solo was indeed an impressive achievement; and so, in its different way, was Sargeant's not seeing what there had been to see up to that point: Nureyev's dramatic performance, which from Albrecht's first impetuous rush onto the stage held the eye with the power of presence and expressivity that was sustained through every detail; the extraordinary things he made of Albrecht's movements in the dances with Giselle and the villagers in the first act; and above all what he made of the adagio with Giselle in the second act, with movements extraordinary not only in themselves but in the way they worked with Margot Fonteyn's to heighten their beauty and effect.

It isn't only musicians, then, who have to endure the stupidity of critics—and even worse than stupidity. The man who as critic of the New York *Times* wielded enormous power in the dance world for years, John Martin, had an unerring eye for greatness and an unrelenting hatred for it. A prime target of this hatred for many of those years was the work of Balanchine—until suddenly, a few years ago, one was astonished by Sunday articles in which Martin talked about Balanchine's greatness quite as though it was something he had been talking about all along. Even then what he wrote as a professed friend could be as unrelated to reality as what he had written as an enemy. Thus *Apollo*—the marvelously beautiful work of art in which Balanchine, still only in his twenties, first defined his personal classical style —Martin continued to describe as "a very young and dated effort," important only as a "historical milestone"; and when he finally ac-

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cepted it, it was with the explanation that Jacques d'Amboise's performance was the first to "publish its true style and importance" and thus to "validate a masterpiece"; whereas actually he had rejected the work when its true style and beauty had been "published" by the performances of Lew Christensen in 1937 and Eglevsky in 1945, and now accepted it when the style and beauty were obscured by the stiff, angular and pompous performance of d'Amboise.

Equally unrelated to reality has been Martin's writing about Nureyev. After the dancer's single appearance here two years ago Martin denounced the folly of a gifted but insufficiently trained and undisciplined boy whose head had been turned by excessive acclaim in Paris, and who as a result had defected from the Kirov company and in so doing thrown away his chances of developing into a mature artist. And Nureyev's work with the Royal Ballet last spring elicited an even angrier denunciation, this time in *The Saturday Review,* in which Martin accused him of wrecking the performances with his single aim of attracting attention to himself at every moment—the manifestations of this aim having ranged from needlessly interpolated stage business to partnering of Fonteyn in which his every movement had competed with hers. As against these fantasies there were the realities of the situation: Nureyev's explanation that he had defected because of the stratification of the Kirov company, which he had foreseen would for years limit his opportunities and in this way hinder the development of his capacities; and his employment of these capacities in the Royal Ballet's performances last spring, which demonstrated that he, the company and the public all had gained by the desperate action that had freed him.

What must be added is that English ballet criticism also seems to be unrelated to reality—to judge from the English reviews which led me to see Frederick Ashton's *The Two Pigeons* and Kenneth MacMillan's *The Invitation* with expectations that were disappointed by the dreary realities of these two pieces.

JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

AT THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER, the New York drama critic looks forward to the coming of merciless heat and humidity with roughly equal trepidation as to the coming of Shakespeare. For what has been passing, year

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after year, for Shakespeare both in New York's Central Park and in neighboring Stratford, Connecticut, though apt to lack the slightest warmth and to produce only a cold sweat, is a fearsome thing, all the same.

The current summer season opened in Central Park with *Antony and Cleopatra,* and at Stratford with *King Lear.* Two better plays in the Shakespearean canon would be hard to find, and if someone were to twist my arm until I named the greatest play ever written, I would, under protest against being thus mishandled, nominate *Lear.* If, however, an intelligent man and woman from Mars and Venus (let us match plays and planets properly) were to view this *Antony and Cleopatra,* and if a no less perceptive but unindoctrinated observer from Jupiter were confronted with this *King Lear,* none of them could explain what all the shouting—and I do not mean the shouting on the stage—was about.

Indeed, the two productions illustrate very neatly two ways in which American attempts at Shakespeare tend to fail. The Central Park production reminds us of the work of fairly gifted amateurs; the Stratford one of the work of jaded, played-out professionals. And professionals who were not very good in the first place. One characteristic impropriety, though, we are, I am happy to say, spared: *Lear* is not transposed to eighteenth-century Venice, and *Antony*—though the make-up department did fall under the influence of the great Twentieth-Century Fox face-painters—is at least not laid in the Vienna of Johann Strauss.

Let us look into Central Park first; uncharitableness, too, should begin at home. Like the unfortunate movie, *Cleopatra,* I just alluded to, the Central Park production lacks two things no *Antony and Cleopatra* can do without: grandeur and passion. Shakespeare, as we well know, wrote three plays named after pairs of lovers: *Romeo and Juliet, Troilus and Cressida,* and *Antony and Cleopatra.* The first deals with the rapturous idealism of youthful love untainted by worldliness; the second is about love not so young or naive—at least as far as Cressida is concerned—and shows how the love of the mature but trivial *demi-vierge* becomes the plaything of the flesh, the world, and that devil, Expediency; the third, *Antony and Cleopatra,* embodies the love of two beings, mighty, passionate, and middle-aged—aware that this, irrevocably, is their last chance at something greater than senescent dalliance—mere lust or doting self-indulgence. A greater empire than the Roman is at stake: two powerful human beings' empire over their appetites, their emotions, their happiness in the afternoon years.

None of this is conveyed in Central Park. Colleen Dewhurst's Cleopatra is a dish-faced and pear-shaped matron: what felineness she has, is strictly of the Cheshire-cat variety—of a Cheshire cat that has just swallowed whole an enormous canary. Miss Dewhurst speaks poetry as though she were ordering her week-end food supply over the telephone

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and were torn between conflicting motivations: a grocer's clerk whose slow understanding needs careful dictation, and a thrilling suspense show on TV from which every minute of telephoning kept her agonizingly away. It may be that there were times when Miss Dewhurst (who occasionally lapsed into a Broadway Irish brogue) did attempt either regal bearing or flirtatious sensuality, but if so, they were indistinguishable one from the other, and the performance merges in my memory into one pallid smirk.

As for Michael Higgins's commonplace Antony (also vaguely Irish at times), he was as undrawn to this Cleopatra as she was to him—an aloofness for which, under the circumstances, neither can be blamed. Mr. Higgins delivered his lines in a businesslike way, as, for instance, United Parcel Service might see to it that an unwieldy package gets to you speedily and only slightly dented in two or three places, but with that he felt his chores were over. He is, in fact, a rather good comic actor, and had he settled for a slightly comic Antony, or, at any rate, a cynically wearied one, such as Laurence Olivier played here a number of years ago, he might have almost gotten away with it. As it is, the performance approached that proverbial theatrical nightmare: the burlesque comic realizing his dream and playing Hamlet.

Once the stuffiing is knocked out of the play, it matters little if some of its less central aspects are well handled—not that there was much danger of this occurring here. The visual aspects of the production are undistinguished, the supporting cast fair to frightful (the proportion being one fair to six frightful), and Joseph Papp's direction obvious, except in the few places where it was preposterous, as when the clown who brings the asps is made sinister rather than merely garrulous, with the result that the scene loses its point: the world, tragicomically importunate, making its last bid to detain Cleopatra for all her imperious impatience to leave it. Something needs to be said about the doubling, too, which had, for instance, the same actor portraying a great Roman general, a pathetic messenger who gets whipped, and, again, another Roman general, without so much as a costume change. As for David Amram's music, the whining of a present-day Arab street singer backed up by a Casbah combo, it was ghastly.

Now over to Stratford, Connecticut, and *King Lear*. Here veteran Group Theatre actor, Morris Carnovsky, gives us a Lear who is both inches a king. Mr. Carnovsky has a kind of greasy competence, a glib orotundity—the manner of a retired choir-master trying to show off in ordinary speech his former profession—and, with this, a chunky figure, some lower-class Jewish gestures and intonations, and, all in all, a slickness that sometimes becomes pathetic, but never tragic. Oddly enough, what dignity Mr. Carnovsky manages to muster shows up in the earlier parts of the play, where it is not particularly apposite, and is lacking from the latter parts, where it is essential.

In the other roles, Douglas Watson makes an effective, though per-

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haps excessively frolicsome, Edmund, and Philip Bosco is a fine Kent, unobtrusively commanding. But the others! Lester Rawlins's Fool—barefoot, hunched over, covered with a sheepskin—sports a curious red wig, uses his hands as though they were stumps, and whines incessantly. He looks for all the world like a cross between Disraeli and an inverted orangutan. There is a militantly emasculated Oswald, and a chirping, mincing, Southern-accented whale who is supposed to be Gloucester. And so on.

The three ladies (did they accidentally wander into this play out of *Macbeth*?) consist of a Goneril with fluttering hands and hysterical verbiage who is a graduate of several Tennessee Williams plays; a Regan with a Melisande wig and a finishing-school accent aspiring to become the vamp of the debutante cotillions; and a Cordelia who does not come to life until she is carried on stage dead. Perpendicular and moving about, Anne Draper is unattractive, unfeminine, her voice ever brash, and her reading of her lines rather like kid sister's recitation of daddy's birthday poem. But once she lies lifeless and longitudinal at Lear's feet, she becomes the most touching, the deadest Cordelia I have ever seen. I have my doubts about Miss Draper's future as an actress, but she ought to be a whopping success as a prop.

Allen Fletcher's direction, despite a nice grouping here, a clever touch there, is unable to cope with the masterly orchestration needed for the great storm and Dover scenes. Conrad Sousa's music, however, is not without imagination, and a storm that is part sound effects, part musical crescendos skilfully blended, is emotionally compelling. Scenery and costumes were unexciting but proficient.

But neither the great, passionate protests against the godlessness of men and gods, against the breakdown of decency, charity, family ties; nor such almost unendurably moving moments as the recognition scene between Lear and Cordelia (IV, 7) or the death of Lear, come anywhere near shaking us. As performed at Stratford, the tragedy of Lear consists in never becoming a tragedy.

Which brings me to a generalization. Shakespeare has been translated into all kinds of languages: into some, like German, highly successfully; into others, like French, unsatisfactorily. The strange and sad fact is that American, too, is a language into which Shakespeare does not translate well. Partly because the cadences of American speech are essentially unmelodious, and partly because American actors come to poetry in general and Shakespeare in particular much too late in life—if at all. Inasmuch as American speech is not very likely to change appreciably in the foreseeable future, we shall have to pin our hopes to the not much more likely contingency of the American theatre changing its ways. Until this happens, however, no amount of Shakespeare festivals from Oregon to Connecticut, from San Diego to Central Park, is going to make us any less de-Barded, or Shakespeare any less debarred.

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MARIUS BEWLEY

A Time of Waiting?

As a series of critical descriptions (hardly evaluations) of the work of some twenty contemporary British poets, Mr. Press's new book[1] is perhaps better than one had a right to expect. But this kind of book inevitably leaves one uneasy. One is usually justified in suspecting a work of criticism whose title includes the word "trends." Sooner or later the word is almost certain to betray the author into facile generalizations and quick excursions into watered-down sociology for the purpose of constructing "patterns." Although Mr. Press sensibly prefers to function as a critic most of the time, he is capable of unfortunate lapses into the sociologist's role:

> . . . it is absurd to pretend that in our affluent society a poet can find nothing to arouse his indignation. Although we have tidied away the slums, we have 750,000 houses officially 'condemned as unfit for human habitation', two million with no internal lavatory, and four million without a bath.

It is difficult not to be very disturbed by a critic who begins like that. One of the greatest of all poems of indignant protest is Blake's "London." But does Mr. Press seriously imagine that a twentieth century Blake might be led to a similar achievement because England still has two million outdoor lavatories?

To write a book about contemporary "trends" in anything is probably indicative of a sanguine temperament. It conjures up a vision of goals and destinations that can be regarded with complacency. It suggests progression across a tidied-up topography that is more likely to exist in the analyst's mind than to represent an actual terrain. Not that Mr. Press denies realities: his landscape is pleasingly dotted with ruins that are fashionable in this kind of writing: "The threat of nuclear warfare hangs over much verse composed since 1945, and even poems on traditional Christmas themes may be overcast by this shadow." But at the same time he has no real imagination of disaster, and the fact that he has discovered some twenty English poets writing in the 1950's whom he can discuss with equal seriousness proves him nothing if not gregarious.

This book is based on a set of lectures subsidized by the George Ellis-

[1] RULE AND ENERGY: TRENDS IN BRITISH POETRY SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR, by *John Press*. Oxford University Press. $5.75.

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ton Poetry Foundation at the University of Cincinnati, and some of the dissatisfaction one feels with it stems from the necessity of presenting a largely intractable subject in a format simplified enough to be followed easily by a general audience. Mr. Press has been asked to discover an underlying order among poets as heterogeneous in their characters and talents as the articles displayed on a notions counter. It would be unfair to expect any profounder "order" than one of manageable neatness to emerge from such an assignment. Mr. Press is very neat indeed: George Barker, David Gascoyne, and Vernon Watkins are discussed under the Blakean rubric, "The Fourfold Vision," although one must admit that this faculty does not appear particularly Blakean in them; Philip Larkin and Charles Tomlinson, to better critical purpose, are contrasted as provincial and traditional poets respectively; Jack Clemo, F. T. Prince, and R. S. Thomas are grouped together as religious poets. If it is a little difficult to see a Calvinist, a Catholic, and an Anglican priest forming a "trend" among themselves as writers of religious verse, it is only fair to say that Mr. Press recognizes the difficulty too, and treats it with tact. With very little persuasion Roy Fuller, Ted Hughes, and Thom Gunn line up as metaphysical poets, although Thom Gunn is the only one who really looks at ease there. Lawrence Durrell, D. J. Enright, and John Heath-Stubbs appear as "Travellers." Many of these poets could have been discussed as easily, perhaps in a few cases more so, in another category than that in which they are actually placed. This kind of grouping makes things tidy, but does it represent anything that can honestly be called "trends"? Orrick Johns, Sara Teasdale, and T. S. Eliot were all born in St. Louis in the 1880's, and all of them on occasion wrote on frustrated love and the desolation of the urban scene, but obviously any conclusion one might draw from this would have to be very restricted.

It is tempting to ask if any alternative approach to this question of basic tendencies in poetry is possible. One immediately opens oneself to the charge that has been directed here at Mr. Press: of resorting to large, vague, and inadequately grounded generalizations. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a recurrent pattern in the English literary tradition sufficiently defined to make possible a few broad but imprecise suggestions about the present state of poetry in England. Beginning with the seventeenth century there has been a kind of rising and falling rhythm in the tradition of English poetry that, in a rough way, has been repeated every hundred years since then. The last four centuries have each begun with a burst of creative energy in the first quarter that has gradually tapered off to a rather bored monotony during the third quarter, with indications of creative renewal as the century has closed. In the seventeenth century, Jonson and Donne gave way to Cowley and Davenant, and they in their turn sensibly gave way to Dryden. Pope was replaced by Churchill and his peers, but the eighteenth century ended as beautifully as it had begun with *Lyrical Ballads*.

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Keats gave way to Rossetti, Rossetti to Hopkins and the early Yeats (who, of course, was promising only in retrospect). In our century the creative quarter was particularly rich with Olympian names. But for some time English poetry (American poetry seems to have a different schedule) has been going through the arid period of Cowley or of Churchill.

This cycle, if it exists, is naturally attended in each recurrence by countless differences and qualifications, but its phases are not determined by the abundance or poverty of creative genius on the scene at any one time. The amount of creative genius available for poetry in any given decade is doubtless fairly constant, and there is no doubt that many of Mr. Press's poets are writers of large talent. It is rather a matter of occasions, of shifting tensions, of history's seasonal changes. It is a sobering thought to think what Shakespeare might have written had he been born in 1730. Although he spoke of his own century only, Dryden, writing in 1700, was the first poet or critic to sense this underlying shape of things in *The Secular Masque.* While the quality of Dryden's verse on the eve of his death retained, even augmented, its old vitality, a note of cynicism, of literary disillusionment, crept through:

> The fools are only thinner,
> With all our cost and care;
> But neither side a winner,
> For things are as they were.

Dryden was nearly seventy when he wrote *The Secular Masque,* but the disillusionment it expresses at the close of England's greatest creative century was not owing to his old age. In the masque the huntress Diana represents the great opening years of the century—of James and Charles I, of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Donne; Mars represents the distractions and depletions of the Civil War—and perhaps Milton; Venus, the Restoration and *fin de siècle* decadence. In the splendid closing chorus Dryden expresses a sense of wasted energy and spent faculties, of sheer weariness with literature that is nevertheless communicated in poetry of considerable power and beauty:

> All, all of a piece throughout:
> Thy chase had a beast in view;
> Thy wars brought nothing about;
> Thy lovers were all untrue.
> 'Tis well an old age is out,
> And time to begin a new.

It seems possible that instead of looking for "trends" in contemporary English poetry of the kind Mr. Press has described, it might be more suggestive to try to place the poetry of the 1950's on a scale of historically determined creative intensities. It would then probably be

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found that at this point in the twentieth century (a little ahead of schedule no doubt) English poetry is registering a chill comparable to that Dryden recorded in *The Secular Masque,* and that, however talented English poets may be, they are committed to biding their time until the discovery of new sources of power, and a growth of hopefulness and confidence, make a significant renewal of creative energy in the literary tradition a practical possibility. For even though, like Dryden, many of them may think it is well that an old age is out, the spirit of a new age cannot be evoked from the vasty deep merely by wishing, or even by writing poetry. No age has been more intractable to poetry than the 1940's and 1950's, and for perfectly obvious reasons. Not even Wagner could have assimilated the atom bomb into his art; and hence it follows that to a large extent this is a period of creative waiting. It may be that this is the most significant "trend" of all.

The writers Mr. Press discusses have little in common as poets. It is obviously impossible to give even token consideration to them here, and so I shall simply take three to whom I am partial—very different among themselves—and consider in what ways their poetry may reflect a certain quality of indetermination or "suspension."

Philip Larkin published his one volume of verse, *The Less Deceived,* in 1955. Most of the poems are distinguished, but its one great poem, "Church Going," is a masterpiece, and may be the best English poem written during the period. The real subject of the poem is the age's lack of spiritual definition and self-knowledge. It gives us a dramatization in superb verse of the poet's own profound recognition that "an old age is out," and the concluding stanza, searching into the future for direction, shows us the truth and incredible dignity the human being, even in his worst bewilderment, may still command. Here are the first three stanzas, and the last:

> Once I am sure there's nothing going on
> I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
> Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
> And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
> For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
> Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
> And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
> Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
> My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,
>
> Move forward, run my hand around the font.
> From where I stand, the roof looks almost new—
> Cleaned or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
> Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
> Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
> "Here endeth" much louder than I'd meant.
> The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door

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I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

* * * * * *

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

The young man's awkwardness and embarrassment in the opening stanzas (which some critics, including Mr. Press, have been misguided enough to criticize) point up beautifully the orphaned quality of an age that no longer understands its own tradition, but which obscurely senses the hidden power and meaning of energies that, if temporarily latent, must emerge again, possibly in altered form, as a vital source.

In such a time poets may come to distrust poetry itself as a means of achieving discipline and knowledge. One of the more interesting poets treated by Mr. Press is D. J. Enright, whose volumes have never been reprinted in America. His deliberate underestimation of poetry is characteristic of a period in which the creative sensibility no longer seems firmly in control of moral values. A moralist by temperament, Enright is ultimately skeptical about poetry:

The poet has prepared himself for when he will
No longer write.
In that new darkness, what new light?
After words, people: that's how all art should end.
For art is short, but life is long.

It would be difficult to suggest the peculiar quality of Enright's poems without more extensive quotation than is possible here, but by under-

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cutting his own poetry with almost masochistic eagerness, Enright frequently achieves work of disturbing poignancy. Nevertheless, a poet who is predominantly a moralist writing in a period of moral and stylistic indetermination may occasionally be tempted, in his concern for man's dignity, to forget art's pride. In a better period, man's dignity and the pride of art can scarcely be reckoned separate components.

In those major creative outbursts that, as suggested earlier, have occurred during the opening quarter of the past several centuries, the form and energy of poetry have tended to be inseparable from each other—to have the essence but in one. This ideal—conspicuously realized in Pope's poems, for example—is Thom Gunn's compulsive dream. The title of Mr. Press's book (which would have been more accurately called "The Middle Age of Twentieth Century English Poetry") is taken from some fine lines of one of Thom Gunn's poems:

> You keep both Rule and Energy in view,
> Much power in each, most in the balanced two:
> Ferocity existing in the fence
> Built by an exercised intelligence.

But in a creatively indeterminate period, possessing neither moral nor stylistic security, it is not remarkable that Mr. Gunn's best poems seem to emphasize the hostility between form and energy rather than the harmony. In one of his best known poems, "On the Move," celebrating energy under the symbol of the motorcyclist, he seems to identify energy with mere restiveness:

> At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
> Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
> One is always nearer by not keeping still.

The tragedy of the age is that, having discovered sources of boundless physical power, it has lost all sense of form and boundary both in the artistic and moral worlds. In love with both energy and form, Thom Gunn has written of the dilemma that faces a poet like himself in one of the most sinister and remarkable poems to have been written in recent years by an English poet, "The Allegory of the Wolf Boy." It is, in fact, the 1950's version of Yeats's "The Second Coming." The boy, like all young poets, begins as a social product, against a background of tennis courts, tea tables, and gentle lawns. But nothing in the scene any longer provides a control or a pattern for the instinctual energies and powers inside himself:

> Tonight the boy, still boy open and blond,
> Breaks from the house, wedges his clothes between
> Two moulded garden urns, and goes beyond
> His understanding, through the dark and dust:

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Fields of sharp stubble, abandoned by machine
To the whirring enmity of insect lust.

As yet ungolden in the dense, hot night
The spikes enter his feet: he seeks the moon,
Which, with the touch of its infertile light,
Shall loose desires hoarded against his will
By the long urging of the afternoon.
Slowly the hard rim shifts above the hill.

White in the beam he stops, faces it square,
And the same instant leaping from the ground
Feels the familiar itch of close dark hair;
Then, clean exception to the natural laws,
Only to instinct and the moon being bound,
Drops on four feet. Yet he has bleeding paws.

In ways as numerous as there are poets in Mr. Press's book, his writers register in their verse the creative temperature of the century's third quarter, searching with varying degrees of success for strategies and techniques to overcome the defeats and frustrations it has imposed on them. Some of these writers are immensely impressive; but the sense one finally has is of a period of waiting, of listening to a clock tick towards some predestined renewal that may be near or far, but that no poet, however great his genius, can deliberately hasten.

DENIS DONOGHUE

Hibernus Ludens

ANGLO-IRISH LITERATURE HAS SLUMPED. The bottom has fallen out of the market. If you find someone reading a chapter of *Ulysses* every day and three on Sunday, you may assume that he is thus engaged for love, not money. There was a time when the most casual reminiscence of Joyce, Yeats, or Lady Gregory fetched a lecture-tour, every laundry-bill became an Exhibition. That time is past, and all its giddy raptures. We cannot hope that the entire stock of Anglo-Irish Literature will survive: any attempt in that direction is doomed. But this, as the politicians say, is an opportunity as well as a challenge. Now that the sales-campaign on behalf of Brendan Behan as a Great Writer has been called off, we can get down to more rational discrimination.

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It would be delightful and appropriate if the New Era were to be inaugurated by Vivian Mercier, a critic of notable perception who has given Anglo-Irish Literature more man-hours than any of us could claim and probably more than the literature is worth. Someone in *Troilus and Cressida* says, " 'Tis mad idolatry to make the service greater than the god": Mr. Mercier has thus heroically sinned. But his new book[1] is a disappointment, and I am afraid that its effect will be to drive the literature deeper into the wilderness.

For one thing, the book does not discriminate at all; it is "purely" descriptive. It divides the literature according to theme or manner, which are probably the most misleading divisions one could adopt, short of listing the books in alphabetical order. One example: *The Playboy of the Western World* is a fine play, if less than a masterpiece, but there is no point in knocking up a category called "macabre humour" and inserting *The Playboy* along with *The Plough and the Stars, Spreading the News,* and *Drama at Inish;* especially if you then take a second breath and decide that these works are not, after all, really macabre, but only *"related* to the macabre." I cannot believe that Mr. Mercier enjoyed setting up these straw-categories; indeed, the whole book gives an impression of frightful strain, as if its composition were a relentless act of will, cutting against its author's critical grain.

The thesis is that to appreciate Swift, Joyce, Yeats, Synge, Shaw, O'Casey, and Beckett you must know something of the tradition of Gaelic literary comedy which goes back a thousand years. (I am always wary of critics who tell me that to read Murphy I must first know O'Brien.) I do not believe that a knowledge of Old and Middle Irish literature is essential to the understanding of Swift and the modern Irish writers; many critics innocent of that knowledge have read the modern literature with verifiable perception. Mr. Mercier's insistence will have the effect of discouraging those who want to read *Gulliver's Travels* but don't want to take an examination in *Eachtra Chleirigh na gCroiceann.* His book is a "Keep Out" notice, peculiarly inappropriate at a time when the traffic is rushing the other way.

To take this in some detail: Mr. Mercier discusses a relation between *Gulliver's Travels* and the Early Irish *immram* tradition of marvellous voyages, an idea which he attributes to William Matthews. On his own authority he proposes another "analogue" between *Gulliver's Travels* and the leprechaun material in *Aidheadh Fhearghusa.* Both suggestions are far-fetched. Elizabethan travel-literature is a much closer model, if Swift required one, at least as monstrous and fantastic as the *immram* and far more readily available to one whose knowledge of Irish was doubtful and, at best, small. There are many gaps in the scholarly understanding of Swift. Contemporary science, philosophy, grammar, logic, rhetoric, and theology are still rather dark matters, and I have no doubt that the labours of men like Ronald Crane will enrich our

[1] THE IRISH COMIC TRADITION, by *Vivian Mercier.* Oxford University Press. $7.00.

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reading of *Gulliver's Travels* by revealing its intellectual environment. But the accumulation of casual resemblances is useless. To glance at the other writers: Mr. Mercier concedes that Synge "stands almost entirely outside the Gaelic tradition." Shaw has no more place in the story than Goldsmith. Yeats seems to me to have no connection with the Gaelic Comic Tradition. Mr. Mercier doesn't insist upon O'Casey. As for Joyce: Mr. Mercier has a chapter on the Master's relation to an "Irish tradition of parody," but this is now pretty familiar material, and I do not know what Mr. Mercier's reader is meant to do with the notion that Joyce worked in this tradition "without being fully aware of it." Mr. Mercier allows that "Beckett's relationship to the Gaelic tradition seems tangential indeed"; in it but not of it, since a place must be found for him.

The trouble about this is that Mr. Mercier keeps insisting that the structure of his thesis is firm, but when you inspect it in detail it is a ruin, and the really perceptive things are stones lying about here and there which got into the book simply because they struck him. There is a splendid moment when he talks about Beckett's fiction and says brilliant things which made me curse his thesis and wish he would chuck the damn thing aside and go off and write a book on Sam.

Meanwhile, I wish he would take the pledge against analogues. Comparative Literature is a fashionable and illuminating study, but it urgently needs a rationale (not a "method") if it is to preserve itself against the demons of loose association and casual resemblance. If you fasten upon something in a twelfth century text and then say that it's very like something in Joyce or Beckett, what have you proved? You have not shown any relation between the "tradition" and the "individual talent": you have merely said that one thing is in some respect like another. I suspect that this procedure gained ground after symbolist poetry, with its "juxtaposition without copula," a pretty sophisticated device in poetry and, in critical prose, intolerable. Even if we reject the sacramental vision which makes life tingle with analogies, we must recognize that practically any two objects can be brought into resemblance at some point: indeed, the intellectual feat is to think of two objects in every respect disparate. Mr. Mercier tosses his analogues on the principle, "heads I win, tails you lose." If you ask how a writer "can show continuity with a tradition of whose very existence he is hardly aware, or imitate models which he has never seen"—a fair question—Mr. Mercier has an answer: "the oral culture of any area is far richer and more complex than its literary culture," hence many elements remain in suspension, "waiting for the right temperament to act like a reagent and cause them to precipitate." But even if this is so, the oral culture of Ireland is precisely the part of the question which Mr. Mercier has ignored: he has not studied Irish folklore. This is unfortunate, because that lore often exhibits forms of comedy more genial than those discussed by Mr. Mercier. I have no wish to sound

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like Graham Greene's Q. C. Savory who in *Stamboul Train* votes for Chaucer and healthy open-air literature, but Mr. Mercier has decided that Irish comedy is parody, the macabre, the satirical, the grotesque, and he is a hard man to shake. An innocent reader of this book would get the impression that every laugh in Ireland arises from the spectacle of huge men having intercourse with tiny women. One of his favourite analogues is that between Yeats's Crazy Jane and the Irish stone-carvings called "sheela-na-gigs":

> All these female figures have in common either grossly exaggerated genitalia or a posture which directs attention to the genitalia—and usually a combination of both features . . . an ugly mask-like or skull-like face, with a huge, scowling mouth; skeletal ribs; huge genitalia held open by both hands; bent legs.

Jane? Here Mr. Mercier prefers his own bright idea to what Yeats himself has told us about this character on several occasions.

This kind of solemnity is pervasive. I think it probably arises from Mr. Mercier's vagueness on the subject of Comedy. He does not seem to hold any particular theory of comedy, and he would have done well to hire one for the occasion, perhaps from Albert Cook's *The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean,* Northrop Frye's "The Argument of Comedy," W. H. Auden's "Notes on the Comic," or Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes toward History*. Mr. Mercier points reverently toward Huizinga's *Homo Ludens,* but he eschews the pure play of scholarship and remains blind to the pure play of Irish humour. Lacking a cogent Idea of Comedy, he is in no position to discriminate: hence the second impression likely to fall upon the innocent reader is that the comedy of Irish literature is a tedious mess of puns and verbal gimmicks.

This is largely true. Most of the Early and Middle Irish literature I have read is of no literary interest whatever; engrossing only to professional lexicographers and linguists. Mr. Mercier quotes, in Kuno Meyer's translation, an Early Irish quatrain satirising a glutton:

> Bit upon bit,
> Woe to him who puts them into his belly.
> The Son of God will not be pleased with him
> For filling the privies.

Here, he says, "the imagination of a Swiftian satirist is at work." This is poor salesmanship: no one will buy this who wants the genuine Swiftian article. I think Mr. Mercier would have served his god more loyally by picking out the few comic works of real quality between *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* and *The Sun Dances at Easter* and writing a critical essay on each. The rest is Kleenex comedy, to be used once and thrown away.

When the English edition of Mr. Mercier's book appeared some

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months ago I noted the event briefly in the *Manchester Guardian*. A few days later I was rebuked by one of the most learned students of Early Irish Literature for failing to give credit where it was due. This scholar shared my disappointment with the book and agreed, in particular, that its account of Irish comedy was perversely oblique. But he insisted that the book attempted to do something which (*a*) had not been done before, (*b*) was extremely difficult, and (*c*) needed to be done. In the present century a good deal of scholarly work has been done on Early and Middle Irish Literature, but this work is for the most part fragmentary: essays, notes, editions, papers read to the *Royal Irish Academy*. A few popular compilations have been published, but nothing like a sustained treatment. Mr. Mercier says that he was compelled "to attempt almost single-handed a synoptic view of a subject-matter ranging over eleven centuries and two languages." This is absolutely true. On the second point, the difficulty: it must have been a brute of a job. The literature exists in splinters, the editing is incomplete, the scholars annotate, argue, conjecture. And then for the ambiguous route-march into Swift and the moderns Mr. Mercier was almost entirely on his own. Was the journey necessary? Yes, of course, insofar as the Early and Middle Irish material is concerned: but I can't see that it throws much light upon the Anglo-Irish. I think we must continue to read Swift, Yeats, and Joyce and even—if we have world enough and time—the minor writers on the assumption that most of their meaning is on the English printed page. The writers who are to any negotiable extent "within" a Gaelic tradition are very few, and where you find them you find their reasons political and/or theological rather than literary. Daniel Corkery's fiction is a case in point: he wrote English as an instrument of ethical and nationalistic rhetoric. If his English dialogue is virtually translated from spoken Irish, this is his way of asserting that all is not lost, that an Irish spirit persists which the English could not destroy.

Mr. Mercier argues that modern Anglo-Irish literature is parody, grotesque fantasy, an essay in the macabre. I think it is an elegy for great dead kings. Where it is weak it is pastoral, nostalgic, sentimental, a lullaby for a hurt child: this is why its house is inhabited only by children and old men. The fantasy is partly "pure play," partly nostalgia for a heroic time, partly the "life with a blessing" of *Heartbreak House*.

But all this in parenthesis. Mr. Mercier says that his book makes no claim to be the last word on its subject; "it is much closer to being the first one." Kenneth Burke remarks somewhere that very often when you meet someone for the first time you get along harmoniously for a while but then, as the conversation gets under way, you disclose more and more areas of disagreement, and finally you are tearing each other apart. And especially if your acquaintance is a formidable character, you can't let go or agree to differ. Mr. Mercier I find a very formidable character indeed.

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PAUL LEVINE

Easterns and Westerns

> My own feeling is that writers who see by the light of their Christian faith will have, in these times, the sharpest eyes for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable.
>
> —Flannery O'Connor

> In real life the fantastic and the ordinary, the plain and the symbolic, are often indissolubly joined together, and I think the best novels explore and exhibit life without disjoining them.
>
> —Iris Murdoch

> Right now I put my hope in a phantasmagoric art, with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art would correspond best to the spirit of our time.
>
> —Abram Tertz

THOMAS MANN SAID SOMEWHERE THAT THE GROTESQUE was the true anti-bourgeois style. The notion is attractive—especially to students of contemporary literature which is anti-bourgeois in content—but, ironically, it has run counter to Marxist aesthetics. In the expressionistic fiction of the West *society* is the villain at the expense of the anti-heroic *self;* in the naturalistic literature of the East *society* is the collective hero at the expense of the anti-social *self*. Lately, however, the realistic, anti-individualistic nature of Communist art has been breaking down. The new fiction coming out of Warsaw and Moscow—like the new fiction coming out of Paris and New York—expresses itself first through the individuality of its imaginative vision and then by the universality of its paradoxical celebration of individualism in the midst of its depiction of the defeat of the individual. Whether their setting is Belgrade or Berlin or the mythical kingdom of Babenhausen the novels of recent months have reaffirmed, in different ways, not merely similar aspirations but a common vision.[1]

[1] EHRENGARD by *Isak Dinesen*. Random House. $3.95. THE ROCK GARDEN by *Nikos Kazantzakis*. Simon and Schuster. $4.50. THE UNICORN by *Iris Murdoch*. Viking. $5.00. MY ENEMY'S ENEMY by *Kingsley Amis*. Harcourt, Brace and World. $3.95. THE AGE OF MALAISE by *Dacia Maraini*. Grove Press. $3.95. SALT by *Herbert Gold*. Dial Press. $4.95. TEXTURES OF LIFE by *Hortense Calisher*. Little, Brown and Co. $4.75. V. by *Thomas Pynchon*. Lippincott. $5.95. CAT AND MOUSE by *Günter Grass*. Harcourt, Brace and World. $3.95. SPECULATIONS ABOUT JAKOB by *Uwe Johnson*. Grove Press. $4.50. A PRAYER FOR MY BRETHREN by *Mladen Oljača*. Pantheon. $4.95. FANTASTIC STORIES by *Abram Tertz*. Pantheon. $3.95. THE GIFT by *Vladimir Nabokov*. Putnam. $5.95.

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Reading *Ehrengard* by the late Danish writer, Isak Dinesen, reminds us that Tertz's "phantasmagoric art" is also part of the old wave of modern literature. *Ehrengard* is a tale which "told itself" a century ago about a royal scandal in Babenhausen and its effect upon a worldly court painter and a virginal noblewoman. For the worldly Cazotte art and seduction are interchangeable parts of an intellectual equation and Ehrengard's physical and emotional intactness becomes a challenge to his genius. "For what does seduction mean but the ability to make, with infinite trouble, patience and perseverance, the object upon which you concentrate your mind give forth, voluntarily and enraptured, its very core and essence? . . . I have seduced an old earthenware pot and two lemons into yielding their innermost being to me, to become mine and, at the same moment, to become phenomena of overwhelming loveliness and delight." Realizing that "the seducer's art" does not "in each individual fetch him the same trophy," Cazotte sets out to seduce Ehrengard mentally as thoroughly as if he had seduced her physically.

It would be easy to call *Ehrengard* a parable of the artist and let it go at that. But this says nothing about the author's cultivated simplicity of style or the refined sophistication of her story. Spinning her tale with such deceptive ease that the reader is seduced as unwittingly as Ehrengard, Isak Dinesen recalls the talent of another Dane, Hans Christian Andersen, whose sly fairy tales somehow elude proper translation. Like her tales, Isak Dinesen's elegant talent belonged to another era; it is unlikely that we shall see its equal again for some time.

The Rock Garden is an early work by another noted writer who died recently, Nikos Kazantzakis. Written in 1936, the novel is a fictionalized account of the author's first trip to the Orient. "The ancient Greeks," Kazantzakis writes, "used to say that the soul is a 'coexercise of the five senses.' I am such a soul. I am an animal with five tentacles that caresses the world. . . . For me, China is a new pasture where I shall let my little flock graze, my five starving tigers: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch." *The Rock Garden* is the story of "the two journeys: the visible one across China and the invisible one. . . ." As a travel book of the Orient *The Rock Garden* is lush, picturesque, and even prophetic in its "glimpse of the terrible China that has begun walking East"; as a travel book of the soul *The Rock Garden* is a bit heavier going; but as a novel it is contrived, tedious, and utterly impossible.

Like *Ehrengard,* Iris Murdoch's new novel, *The Unicorn,* concerns a fairy tale princess—only this one lives under a curse in an enchanted castle. Marian Taylor, a commonsensical schoolmistress comes to remote Gaze Castle as a tutor only to find that her pupil is a beautiful but distracted and fey young woman mysteriously estranged from her husband and the outside world. Hannah Crean-Smith is *"la princesse lointaine"* held captive in a prison of her own creation as three potential Prince Charmings—Philip, her former lover; Effingham, her courtly

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lover; and Gerald, her jailer—each attempts to rouse the Sleeping Beauty.

Miss Murdoch joins the fantastic and the ordinary with consummate skill, weaving a spell of her own around Gaze Castle but with curiously unsatisfying results. Hannah is described as a scapegoat, a Christ figure, and as "a legendary creature, a beautiful unicorn," but she never seems as significant as her mythic content. "She is our image of the significance of suffering," explains Philip's father, putting his finger on the problem. "But we must also see her as real." Like Hannah, most of Miss Murdoch's characters resemble fugitive types from a British manor house mystery who have somehow wandered into the wrong novel. As Marian leaves the debacle at Gaze Castle behind her "she did not know whether the world in which she had been living was a world of good or of evil, a world of significant suffering or a devil's shadow-play, a mere nightmare of violence." Marian is not sure; neither, I fear, is the reader.

Perhaps Miss Murdoch wrote the best criticism of her own novel when she noted recently in *The Partisan Review:* "One starts off—at least I start off—hoping every time that this [creation of autonomous characters] is going to happen and that a lot of people who are not me are going to come into existence in some wonderful way. Yet often it turns out in the end that something about the structure of the work itself, the myth as it were of the work, has drawn all these people into a sort of spiral, or into a kind of form which ultimately is the form of one's own mind." To put it succinctly, despite her superb talents, Miss Murdoch's characters do not sustain her "myth."

It is a long way from remote Gaze Castle to Kingsley Amis's everyday welfare state, proving perhaps that the sun still never sets on the British Empire. Mr. Amis's new collection of stories is called *My Enemy's Enemy* although it might more appropriately be entitled *I Spy Strangers* after his best and most ambitious story. From the British army in 1945 to some astronauts in the not-too-distant future, Amis sketches a changing England shifting painfully from the priorities of the class system to the paternalism of the welfare state; and the strangers he spies are those *"technicians in paternalism"* who dispense welfare with hauteur and no heart: conservative army officers and snobbish social workers. Yet Amis's intellectual protagonists—invariably self-effacing observers, not actors—seem strangers, too, in his proletarian world of enlisted men and working girls; and the question lingers after the volume is closed as to whether the welfare state will create a culture as mindless as the class system's was heartless.

"What interests you most in life?" someone asks the teen-age heroine of Dacia Maraini's prize-winning novel, *The Age of Malaise.* "I don't know. Love, I suppose," she answers. Like Mr. Amis's heroes, Miss Maraini's heroine comes from the working class but whereas Amis is primarily concerned with the anatomy of society Miss Maraini is content to depict ordinary anatomy. Winner of the $10,000 Formentor

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Prize, *The Age of Malaise* is supposed to resemble the novels of Camus and Moravia in the dispassionate objectivity of its amoral central intelligence. But Camus' outsider is a figure tragically emptied of conventional responses while Enrica's toneless recitation of her affairs suggests that she was empty-headed to begin with. More penetrated than penetrating, Enrica reduces her quest for love to a banal cataloguing of sexual adventures as in this typical dialogue with her lover, Cesare:

> [Cesare:] "Don't tell me your father hasn't the money to buy you a new sweater. A cheap one I mean."
> [Enrica:] "Where does my father come in? My father's wrapped up in the insurance business. He hardly knows he has a family. But I'm clean underneath. I wash my own underclothes."
> [Cesare:] "That reminds me . . . get your clothes off."

The Age of Malaise is a dull echo of the *dolce vita* syndrome. Herbert Gold's *Salt* is a western of the *Playboy* world. Touching all the conventions of life among the lonely crowd on and off Madison Avenue, Mr. Gold draws a triangle of two old army buddies and the girl whom one of them really loves and the other one merely uses. Pretty Barbara is a small town girl in the big city; poor Dan, a sad sack hero from Cleveland who is trying to forget a divorce; and suave Peter, a cynical Wall Street junior executive who juggles oranges to keep his balance between love affairs. Around this configuration, Gold paints in the usual local color: Village hipsters, suburban organization men, and, of course, GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS.

Gold's ironic sweet-and-sour style is quite good for reproducing the sidewalks of New York—"it's a lovely city at certain intense moments, both hard and cajoling—but what do you do with the rest of the moments?"—but quite inadequate for penetrating beneath the surface. In a serious moment Dan tells Peter: "If politics and work have lost their meaning in our lives, we make love bear too much of the burden." I was not convinced that Dan and Peter were old buddies and I could never believe that politics or work had ever meant anything to either of them. Gold's characters may be looking for love but they will settle for sex; and while there is nothing necessarily wrong with their attitude there is something definitely wrong with the author's. Mr. Gold wants it both ways: to be hip with the hipsters and moral with the moralists; and his final rejection of the New York scene—irritating and unconvincing as it is—is magically consistent with the *Playboy* philosophy of bourgeois bohemianism. I can think of no more damning criticism of this book than my absolute certainty that Hugh Hefner loved it.

If Herbert Gold is cool then Hortense Calisher is cooler. *Textures of Life,* her stylish and intimate study of the effects of an affluent society upon two generations, involves a young couple whose surviving parents (his father, her mother) marry each other. Liz Pagani "intended never

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to make her possessions her only signature on life" as she felt her mother had. David Pagani had learned from his invalided father the proper value of things. As the younger couple grows into a family it finds possessions a necessary evil; as their parents grow older they find them a mixed blessing. Old Mr. Pagani notes:

> Men and women both, he too, were confused by their love of the particular, which all their ethic, East or West, taught was sinful. Once he too had thought of it as the surface frivol of existence. He saw it now with the hungry reverence of a man who had not too much time for it . . . as what kept men from flying off the planet altogether, or a man from sinking into the saw-toothed fires at his own core.

There is something somberly fatalistic about this attitude which even Liz's baby girl cannot charm away. Although Miss Calisher fares better with the younger generation than with the older, the total effect of her short novel is quite moving in its minor key. Magnifying its tiny objects so as to bring out the textures of life, Miss Calisher creates a fictive world whose subtle intimacy is its most endearing quality.

Mr. Gold's characters live in Village apartments; Miss Calisher's younger generation lives in a loft. "The Whole Sick Crew" of Thomas Pynchon's *V.* live essentially underground. *V.* is, among other things, a novel about, among other places, New York. In contrasting scenes of shifting time and place, Mr. Pynchon creates a bizarre mosaic of modern events against which his characters seek their personal destinies. Herbert Stencil, an Englishman committed to solving the mystery of V. in his father's life, and Benny Profane, a "schlemihl" committed to keeping himself alive in a chancy universe, are Mr. Pynchon's *alter egos:* one quixotically pursuing the past in order to find the key to the future and the other doggedly holding on to the present, willing to let the future take care of itself.

V. is rich and inventive, wide and various, overlong and uneven—and in a strange way highly eclectic. It seems, in fact, the apotheosis of the mid-century American novel: one of those loose, baggy monsters that have dominated our post-war fiction. Its free-wheeling form, grotesque style, and seemingly absurd vision put it in the tradition of the new picaresque like *Invisible Man, Crazy in Berlin,* and *Catch-22.* But beyond the absurdity of this universe lies an apocalyptic horror that must be tempered with laughter to be endured. "Hitler, Eichmann, Mengele. Fifteen years ago," a robot explains to Profane. "Has it occurred to you there may be no more standards for crazy or sane, now that it's started?"

Behind this apocalyptic vision is a rejection of the present world that must be called political. Thus it should not be surprising that Pynchon's conception (but not his invention) is derived from Dos Passos's horizontal panorama. As in *U. S. A.,* Pynchon's characters are

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little more than ideographs being carried along on the wave of "events [which] seem to be ordered into an ominous logic." Thus the imperfections and the mysteries—what is so sacred about Profane the schlemihl? of whom is Stencil a carbon copy? is V. Virgin or Venus, Victoria or Vera, Vheissu, Valletta, or Venezuela?—are swept away by the sheer size of Mr. Pynchon's imagination and the scope of his vision. *V.* may not be the perfect evocation of "phantasmagoric art" but, among big American novels, it will do very nicely until something better comes along.

Pynchon's concern for history reminds us that no post-war literature has been so obsessed with the recent past as the German. Günter Grass, who has treated the subject at some length in the widely-acclaimed *The Tin Drum,* returns to the scene of the crime in a remarkable short novel entitled *Cat and Mouse.* Again the place is Danzig and the time the beginning of the war; and again the artistic mode is the fusion of the commonplace and the grotesque. (There is even the recurring figure of a child banging a tin drum.) Teen-aged Joachim Mahlke has a "mouse," an extraordinarily large Adam's apple, which makes him highly vulnerable among the catlike bourgeoisie. Mahlke's attempts to compensate turn him into a stalking cat of a war hero with tragic results. *Cat and Mouse* is first a novel of adolescence and lost innocence. But beyond that Mr. Grass is hinting at the defects in the moral structure of society which makes destruction a game and destroyers its heroes. The novel is written with a deft simplicity that is concise and compelling, occasionally funny and ultimately chilling.

Mr. Grass is concerned with the roots of the past; Uwe Johnson with its strange fruit. A twenty-nine year-old refugee from East Berlin and the first writer of his generation to win international acclaim, Mr. Johnson has written a somber, moving, and difficult novel about the barriers between East and West. *Speculations about Jakob* deals with the events surrounding the mysterious death of an East German railroad worker who becomes involved with a Communist agent and a childhood sweetheart who now works for NATO. The author's speculations about Jakob are pieced together through thought and spoken fragments by the people who knew him. The resulting pattern makes for slow but absorbing reading.

Speculations about Jakob is less important for its picture of drab East German life than for its delineation of the differing assumptions under which life goes on in East and West Germany. Like Thomas Pynchon, Mr. Johnson is concerned with the implications of political events for personal existence. When Jakob is asked to renounce personal friendships for ideological commitments, he answers: "That's asking too much of a man. . . ." "And that," concludes the Soviet agent, "is precisely what is being asked." In this exchange we glimpse the terrifying gulf between the imperatives of Eastern ideology and the permissiveness of Western individualism. The urgency of the Com-

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munist appeal to yield the present for the sake of the future and the personal for the sake of the public is stunning when contrasted to the aimless hedonism and wilful disengagement of Mr. Pynchon's Whole Sick Crew. A jazz musician in *V.* states the modern ethic: "Love with your mouth shut, help without breaking your ass or publicizing it: keep cool but care." In Jakob's world such disengagement is dangerous.

Speculations about Jakob is perhaps the first important post-war German novel to deal explicitly with the present and not the past. Mladen Oljača's *A Prayer for My Brethren,* the first novel I have read from post-war Yugoslavia, is concerned both with the effect of the past on the present and with the question of how much is too much. Like Uwe Johnson, Mr. Oljača has fashioned his novel as a posthumous recounting of the events leading up to his hero's death. But unlike Jakob, Drashko is a partisan hero and party official who tells his own story from his own freshly dug grave. Drashko's problem is that his wartime existence, with its sacrifices, has not prepared him for his post-war life, with *its* sacrifices. Haunted by past memories of senseless brutality and hounded by present reminders of party conformity and private frustration, Drashko, in looking for the youth he never had, descends into a steepening spiral of self-destruction. Faced with the same question that Jakob is asked, Drashko comes to "the conviction that the whole of my generation was a sacrifice, a lost generation."—

> And when I think of the position, I see us as a tragic generation. We had achieved our general ideals, and for that reason we were very proud of ourselves. We had won our revolution, we had made our place in history. That was all very true. But we had forgotten what might be called the private ideals. We have neglected the foundation from which in the last resort a man starts in all that he strives to do. . . . Too late man remembered himself as man.

Mr. Oljača is a noted Yugoslav journalist and his novel, with its flat characters and narrative monotone, is more successful as journalism than as fiction. Somehow the horror of the actual experience is not matched imaginatively. "The truth is hidden in the darkest realms of the mind," Drashko observes in unconscious criticism of his own story. "You've only touched on the surface."

"Every revolution," Drashko is told, *"—and revolutions are essential to human development—takes away yet another portion of our freedom, and without such robbery no revolution could triumph. . . ."* The tension of this paradox forms the basis of "phantasmagoric art" in Abram Tertz's *Fantastic Stories.* Transvestite NKVD agents, grotesque enemies, and personal demons haunt his bizarre world in which the loss of freedom dehumanizes personal existence. Tertz's hero is always the artist as madman and criminal: petty thieves who want to be magicians, men whose power to predict the future ultimately destroys them, insane writers who never publish anything. Sometimes Tertz's surrealistic apparatus seems too literal but in a brilliant tale like

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"Graphomaniacs" he creates an underground world of crazed writers which does indeed "correspond best to the spirit of our time."

Tertz depicts the recurrent problem of artistic communication in a dehumanized world by exploiting the vein of grotesque Russian fantasy that Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Chagall also drew upon. Vladimir Nabokov's last Russian novel, *The Gift,* now published for the first time in English, reminds us that fantasy and alienation are the dual artistic heritage in Russia. *The Gift* concerns a group of Russian exiles living in Berlin in the 1920s but Nabokov is less interested in "the pale ghosts of innumerable foreigners flickering among those natives like a familiar but barely noticeable hallucination" than he is in the nature of the artistic imagination. His hero is an impoverished poet named Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev but his heroine, as he states in the Preface, is "Russian literature." In a central portion of the book Fyodor recounts the biography he has written of a revolutionary writer of the 1860s who was exiled by the Tzar. The ironic parallel between the writer and his subject is beautifully handled in this generally exquisite novel—and when put together with *Fantastic Tales* one begins to feel that the problem of art in Russia is historical and not narrowly ideological.

Nabokov's exiled poet and Tertz's frustrated graphomaniac, like Amis's displaced intellectual and Pynchon's far-out jazz musician, are all reminders of the increasing difficulty of artistic communication in the modern world. But behind the failure of these heroes lies the success of their creators, reaffirming the power of art and teaching, as Tertz says, "how to be truthful with the aid of the absurd and the fantastic." The internationalism of the contemporary artistic vision—grotesque but human—recalls Melville's eloquent prophecy: "For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round."

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Multiple Disguises

THE WORK OF DENIS DE ROUGEMONT, taken as a whole, seems to me obsessed, conventional, disorderly, and unprofitable. Such was my opinion formerly, and since this new book[1] adds nothing exceptional

[1] LOVE DECLARED: ESSAYS ON THE MYTHS OF LOVE, by *Denis de Rougemont.* Pantheon. $4.50.

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to what de Rougemont has said before, such my opinion remains. I state it in these rather vehement terms because I find I more and more resent authors who believe that they may serve the modern world by offering it exercises in analytical simplification. Many of these authors are extremely clever; de Rougemont, of course, is much more: a finely gifted, beautifully learned man. But to me our culture is so obviously not simple and so obviously never was simple that anyone who suggests he can explain it to me in one book arouses my indignation. By now a great many people have made exactly this suggestion, and my tolerance is about gone. I am perfectly willing to grant my animosity: the work of de Rougemont is an intellectual fraud, and it makes not one whit of difference to me that it is also a pious fraud.

Is there any other way to describe a piece of cultural analysis which is so driven by enthusiasm for its schematic concepts that it denies not only history but what everyone knows to be true from the experience of daily living?

Love in the Western World, the book in which de Rougemont first attempted a full-scale account of his ideas, was published in France in 1939 and has enjoyed a considerable vogue ever since. I imagine the main points of it are known to most readers, but a summary will be useful. Human experience, according to de Rougemont, is ruled by two types of love: first, agape or Christian love, which is a love between equal persons and which is typified in a marriage undertaken for purposes of procreation; second, eros or passion, which is a love between unequal persons, which shuns marriage and thrives on separation, which is ultimately not love of a person at all but love of Love, and which ideally ends in the death of the lovers. The two arise from fundamental religious sources. Agape is a development in human terms of the Christian theories of Incarnation and the absolute qualitative separation of God and man; these ideas, in spite of the doctrine of sin, permit holiness on earth and happy love in life. Eros, on the other hand, springs from the Oriental and specifically Manichaean belief in a totally divisive conflict between evil and good, in which evil is identified with the world and the body, and good with heaven and the spirit. Eros entered the main current of Western civilization, still according to de Rougemont, with the Catharist heresy of the twelfth century, and its primordial Western literary expression was in the songs of the troubadours. De Rougemont suggests that most Provençal love poetry was disguised devotional poetry of the Catharist church, in which the lady of the poet's song was a stereotyped representation of the Lady, Maria Sophia, Eternal Wisdom, the Light of Heaven, to whom the poet vowed allegiance, for whom he swore himself (hypocritically or not) to chastity, and with whom he hoped presently to unite himself in death. The whole apparatus of *cortezia,* the laws, the courts, the rituals, the prescripts for *vray amor,* was no more or less than a consciously disguised analogue of the Catharist rites—so de

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Rougemont suggests, although he tempers his historical radicalism by saying that he is more interested in the cultural intent of his analysis than in the determinable history of ideas. After the Albigensian Crusade, the Catharist heresy was fragmented and driven even further underground, and its literary counterpart, now beginning to lose its conscious ground in religion, moved to the north and became linked with Celtic literature. The result was the Arthurian cycle, and the epitome of this cycle was the legend of Tristan and Iseult, in which de Rougemont finds all the necessary ingredients of the erotic myth *par excellence:* the love of Tristan and Iseult is an adulterous relationship of unequals, it thrives on separation (to such an extent that the lovers invent needless obstacles whenever external circumstances fail to provide them), and it ends in the blissful death of the lovers. From this point on, de Rougemont traces the Tristanian myth as it becomes further and further dissociated from its religious source, through Faust, Don Juan, the Romantic upsurgence, and into our own time, when in an almost wholly profaned but very widespread form it has issued in the cult of the movies, the commercialization of sexual imagery, and especially the breakdown of marriage; its political corollary is the totalitarian passion. This summary greatly truncates de Rougemont's schematism, and in particular his analysis of the Tristan legend, which in itself is a marvelous, though unoriginal, study in critical exegesis.

The new book, *Love Declared,* adds nothing essential, though it refines and extends some of the concepts. The principal change is the elevation of Don Juan to a mythical status equal and opposed to that of Tristan within the erotic hierarchy. Thus Western culture is now seen to vibrate between serious, sacred Tristanism and comic, impious Juanism, depending upon its periodic *rapprochements* with the religious sensibility; all this, of course, still being subordinate to the broader antinomy of eros and agape.

A thoroughgoing critique of de Rougemont's theory of love would be valuable except for one consideration: we have had our fill of critique. What we need now is affirmation. And this is my first comment on de Rougemont: he writes from the point of view of a committed Catholic, he praises agape and blames the world's ills on eros, and yet almost his entire work is devoted to a critical discussion of eros. He returns to the articles of his disapproval again and again, obsessively, and without adding anything new. His hope lies, apparently, in some unrealized synthesis of eros and agape, but he is exceedingly vague on this point, and his discussion of agape consists solely of statements that it derives from the Christian commandment to love God and love thy neighbor and that it is good. Yet the problem of married love is far more important and probably far more difficult than the historical analysis of heresy, as some Catholic philosophers are beginning to recognize. Certainly in the modern world the complex "institution" of marriage can

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no longer be reduced to the prescriptive formulas of the historical Church.

Second, like any good Catholic de Rougemont anathematizes the Manichaean dualism, and yet his thought is formed in the same mold. It is interesting to note that in the revised edition of *Love in the Western World,* which was published in 1956, de Rougemont introduced a number of terms from existentialist philosophy as well as the word existentialism itself, applying them to his own position. I don't mean to suggest that this was conscious trimming; de Rougemont acknowledged his debt to Kierkegaard, for instance, from the first. Yet there does seem to have been some attempt to shift the philosophical tone of the argument. In spite of it, and in spite of the essay in the new book devoted to a definition of the person, de Rougemont remains as far from the existentialist attitude as anyone could be. His work is built on dualisms—eros-agape, Tristan-Don Juan—and moreover he insists that Tristan and Don Juan are not persons but forces. (Compare the humane Juan of Montherlant or the absurd Juan of Camus with de Rougemont's eternalized sex maniac.) This is what I mean by analytical simplification; its sign is the dualism and its direct provenance is absolutist idealism. This seems to me a far more insidious and pervasive aspect of fundamental Platonism than the ambiguities which may persist in our sex mores. And the manipulating of ideals in de Rougemont's manner seems to me far less satisfactory (questions of religion aside) for the person who is *rationally* concerned with the predicament of modern civilization than the realism and relativism of writers like Camus, whatever other shortcomings they may possess. At this stage of intellectual history we have no need to be reminded of the determinative power of myth. What we need are suggestions for ways to escape it.

Third, the question of ordinary experience. In one of his most recent statements of the distinction between agape and eros, de Rougemont writes (*Love Declared,* p. 35): ". . . eroticism begins where sexual emotion becomes, beyond its procreative goal, an end in itself or an instrument of the soul. . . ." This sounds very neat, which is what makes me suspect it. Agape equals Christian marriage which equals sex for the purpose of procreation; eros equals adultery which equals sex for its own sake. But at this point, though I suppose it is indiscreet to say so, I begin to wonder if de Rougemont, who has set himself up as the leading philosophical authority on love, has had any experience of it himself. Is anyone who has ever gone to bed in order to make love unaware that the *primary* motive for doing so is immediate sensory pleasure?—susceptible to almost endless refinement, no doubt, and thank God for that, but sensory and thus immediate nevertheless. In other words, marriage, so far as it is definable at all, is a combination of eros and agape, or better yet a tension between them, immensely

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rich and changeable, and any writer who denatures the complexity of this fusion is doing marriage a disservice, not a service.

Fourth, de Rougemont says that the decline of poetry and the rise of the novel, i.e. the shift from lyricism to drama, begins with the transference of the erotic literary center from Provence to the North and with the loss of eroticism's sacral meaning. In other words, *Tristan* is the first novel and de Rougemont's work, as he says, is in one sense an investigation of the novel as the pre-eminent Western literary discipline. But what are we to say about a critic of the novel who doesn't mention Dostoevsky? Is it possible that Dostoevsky's crucial importance cannot be explained in the terms de Rougemont has invented?

Fifth, the historical pivots of de Rougemont's theory are the twelfth century and modern times. The twelfth century was "precisely," as he insists, the time when the erotic myth entered Western civilization; sometimes he pins it down even more narrowly than that. But is this likely, considering what we all know about love? Is it possible, considering what we know about St. Augustine, Scotus Erigena, the schools of Chartres and Arras, to keep solely on the philosophical side? Were human beings all continent up till 1130 A.D.? Does the work of Reinach, Cornford, Schroeder, Dupouy, Stoll, Hoernes, etc., etc., mean nothing? Fertility and procreation have been powerful ideas, of course, but there is plenty of evidence that mankind, primitive or sophisticated, has nearly always made a place for the sex urge as such in his religion, art, and life; and if this is not the meaning of St. Paul's "better to marry than to burn," then it has no meaning, though I myself am not favorably disposed toward such a niggardly way of saying it. De Rougemont asserts further that the twelfth and twentieth centuries are notable for the breakdown of marriage which occurred in each era, under the influence of ascendant eroticism. But here he is venturing into the area which he otherwise excludes from his philosophico-literary analysis: social history. If he mentions the breakdown of marriage at all, then he is obligated to investigate the social factors—e.g. collapse of feudalism, collapse of capitalism—which probably are more important than the cultural factors. At least he ought to acknowledge that, without history, his literary or even mythological criticism of human behavior is in the realm of fantasy. No poet, but only a critic, would arrogate so much responsibility to his own discipline. For that matter, why didn't the modern breakdown of marriage occur during the great upsurgence of erotic Romanticism from Kant to Wagner, rather than a hundred years later when almost the entire Western cultural leadership was in revulsion against it? I don't say these matters cannot be explained; I only say they are wonderfully, magnificently complex. I repeat: any simplification is a degradation.

De Rougemont's accomplishments are praiseworthy. He has given us, for example, a modern definition of the soul which seems practicable from almost any point of view, and though this is implicit among other

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writers, I know no one else, off-hand, who has done it explicitly. Useful work, as is much of his mythological exegesis and some of his comparative analysis of Oriental and Western religions. But all of these accomplishments are ancillary to his main objective. Let us proclaim the end of the age of critique; it has lasted long enough. A cultural philosopher who adopts the methods of critique is living off the work of the past and hence is circumscribing the range of his achievement even before he begins. The change won't be easy. It will require a mental insurrection. It will require the displacement of knowledge—at any rate secondary knowledge—by invention. But if obsolescence is the mother of revolution and necessity the mother of invention, I'd say the only thing lacking now is an obstetrician.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Variations on a Theme by Frye

EVERYTHING I HAVE READ BY NORTHROP FRYE (which includes most of what he has published) has excited me to pleasurable thought. If he wrote in *The Saturday Review* about a book on how to make a stamp collection, I would read the piece confident that even there he would throw off at least one notion worth turning over a time or two. But putting a book of his together as I read it, or after I have finished reading it—that is another matter. He is the Blake of criticism: the system is elaborately preposterous; some of the parts are marvels as brilliant as the eye can bear.

The Well-Tempered Critic[1] consists of three continuous lectures on themes in a region more or less suggested by the title. But I confess I did not read the three essays as cohering into one unified argument. I prowled the book like a mongoose in a wold, seeking and finding succulent prey: woodchuck, wombat, basilisk, field mouse, even a cobra like the last sentence in this passage.

> In front of Adam [in *Paradise Lost*] is a crucial test which will determine whether he is to remain free or throw his freedom away, a test for which he must concentrate on the Word of God within undistracted by the works of God without. To prepare him for this test, Raphael brings him knowledge of practical reason in the only

[1] THE WELL-TEMPERED CRITIC, by *Northrop Frye*. Indiana University Press. $4.50.

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> form in which such knowledge is appropriate to a free man: the form of parable, addressed to what we should call the imagination. He tells Adam the story of the fall of Satan, and leaves Adam to make what use he will of the story. Adam, facing his crisis like a practical man, which means having little practical reason and less imagination, finds the story extremely remote compared to the warm and naked beauty of Eve. He falls "against his better knowledge," which means in effect his literary knowledge, and proves incapable of making the turn from life to literature that would have preserved him in the properly cultivated world of Paradise. Paradise thus disappears as an outward environment, but it revives within the mind, as a vision evoked by the Work which had created it in the first place. Hence Satan was wrong or irrelevant when he said "Space may produce new worlds." The only new worlds for man are those which the free and disciplined use of words can help to create.

That last sentence can cause a lot of trouble if you don't get hold of it the right way, but it provides good nourishment if you do.

Auden is another essayist whose virtue is in his illuminations, and for the most part in *The Dyer's Hand* he excerpts these from their original contexts in essays and puts them in thematic clusters. I don't find this way of ordering his illuminations completely satisfactory: being gluttonous, I read too many of them at a sitting. But perhaps it is preferable to Frye's way of including the whole essay, vapid notions and all. Take this gratuitous politeness about Poe's theory of poetry.

> The example of Homer, given a few pages back, suggests that Poe's theory, however useful as a guide to a certain kind of technique, is inadequate as an observation on literature in general.

Nothing warrants this except the coincidence that Frye's lecture happened to be delivered at Poe's alma mater, the University of Virginia—a good enough reason to include it in a lecture but no reason to print it here. Still, despite my irritation at *The Well-Tempered Critic,* I think it is worth a hundred ordinary critical studies, better put together but illuminating hardly anything.

Instead of reviewing the book, I shall set down the main notion stimulated in me by reading it (and also by my reading at about the same time essays on allied themes by Josephine Miles and Sigurd Burckhardt). The rest of this piece is really the peroration of a homily to English teachers, based on three texts from Frye's book. The first is a sentence which he quotes from a student who returned from a conference of educationalists muttering it:

> "Jobwise, are we structured for this activation?"

The other two are Frye's own:

> . . . a time when, though some of us are afraid of science, we have so much less to fear from science than from a misuse of words.

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> A group of individuals, who retain the power and desire of genuine communication, is a society. An aggregate of egos is a mob. A mob can only respond to reflex and cliché; it can only express itself, directly or through a spokesman, in reflex and cliché.

We who teach English know, unless we are unfortunate, both the joys which all teachers know and the joys which come only with our subject. There is the gratitude of individual students to their teacher for having lighted something up for them; the memory of a good day or a good class lingers in a teacher's mind and refreshes him like a grace; towards the end of a term, a class sometimes comes together as a temporary, fragile, but true community, in which the teacher's authority no longer separates him from the class by elevating him above it but somehow becomes no more than a condition for a special friendliness. And, as a result at least in part of what the teacher has done, in most classes some of the students, in some classes most of them, once in a while all of them, will unmistakably be able by the end of the year to write better than they speak and to read better than they write; that is, they will be able to think and to enjoy themselves somewhat better than they otherwise would have done. Such are the goods that called us to the profession in the first place, though it is the lesser good of job security that we talk about too much, and such are the goods that still call the young who join us.

But we, being human, are subject to accesses of despondency and doubt. Insofar as these are due to our envy of those who have more power, prestige, and money than we, the remedy is clear enough. But sometimes we doubt the value of our profession itself. After a bad class in which none of the students have learned anything or after correcting too many themes or too many examination papers, a teacher sometimes wonders if what he is devoting his life to is worth doing. When his personal rewards fail, he is unsure what general social justification is there to support him, as no physician need be unsure. Indeed, so chronic has this doubt become that in the academy English teachers are distinguished for a strange medley of concern, intelligence, and ironic self-deprecation.

This corrosive doubt is no more warranted among us than it would be among our proud colleagues, the physicists. Even less warranted, for that social justification which our profession has always had has now become society's desperate need. I believe quite literally that, though our society may die despite our best efforts, yet without us it will surely die.

The great nations now, and ours is for the time being the greatest, are threatened with a social disaster even more dreadful than anarchy. From the ashes of a dead society a live one may be hoped to arise. But the modern nightmare is of a superbly functioning State without a soul; of a parody society marvelously equipped with means of communication which, so far from facilitating communion, hinder it; of

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an anti-community which exists, not to shelter its members and make it possible for them to be as human as they will, but to glorify its own greatness in a way which glorifies each citizen a little but which he must pay for with some of his humanity. A computer is the unattainable ideal of this reverse utopia, the IBM corporation's "family" one of its actual simulacra. The nations are drifting, our nation is drifting, in that direction. A sign and a cause of that drift is the corruption of language into mindless and estranging formulae; they are good for nothing so much as for that sort of verbal pollution which is worse than lying because it does not mask the truth as lying does but dissolves it. Without true language this movement towards the automaton State will not be arrested; without true language communion cannot be preserved by the few and restored to the many; without us to pass it on, true language is in danger of irreversible corruption. We alone cannot keep the language alive, but, as things are, without us it will no longer live.

The language of high literature lives only as it is truly read. The language of *Agamemnon* died in the dark ages when no one did or could read it, but it lives now sometimes in a classroom or a study. The language of *The Canterbury Tales* ailed for centuries and was restored to health by scholars. Without us to teach it, the language of Yeats would be nearly dead already. If everyone should be taught by educationalists who spoke and wrote the antilanguage of the following passage, the language of all literature in English would die. (This is quoted by Frye.)

> In matters of curriculum, textbooks, or methods of study, variety is the spice of education and decentralization can be even more readily provided than under the small unit system because the resultant stability of teaching personnel means that the central authorities no longer have to keep so tight a grip upon a shifting texture of educational personnel.

For a teacher to write like this is a form of treason—a betrayal of his duty to society, of such a magnitude as to injure that society. For the profession to abandon itself to such language would be a disaster of the magnitude of an atomic war.

When we doubt, let us each take care to question only his own personal competence, or to curse his ill fortune in having a bad class, or to rail against the dishonesty of the administration of his particular department or school. Let us never doubt our profession. To doubt it is to doubt the value of society—not our particular unwell country, but of society as such, of community, of communion. And if that is not good, we have nothing to say to one another, you and I.

Our highest obligation to society, and the holiness of our calling, is to help as many of our students as we can to make literature a necessary joy in their lives and the language of literature a part of themselves.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Mencken Redivivus?

JOHN SIMON IS BEING TOUTED (by Dwight Macdonald, in his Introduction to *Acid Test*;[1] by the dustjacket blurb; by Mr. Simon himself, implicitly, in his little eulogy of Mencken herein reprinted) as an updated Mencken: equally contentious, nose-thumbing, air-clearing, but more widely read, more deeply cultivated, more leanly witty, more serious; the necessary Nay-Sayer and anti-Quack of our more mordantly exigent 'sixties.

Well, in the prelapsarian 'twenties, Mencken could be a very funny man. Reading him in any bulk is inadvisable: it is like eating a watermelon that turns out after a few bites to be almost all seeds; what qualifies our avidity to be entertained by a man so pleased to be an entertainer is, eventually, the meagerness of his invention, the gritty repetitiveness of his surprisingly small vocabulary of abuse and praise. In samplings, however, he can brim with malice and gusto: "Unluckily, all this took place in the United States, where the word honor, save when it is applied to the structural integrity of women, has only a comic significance." Or, describing Bryan among the Tennessee natives on the occasion of the Scopes trial, he can fix in double exposure for all time an image of American politics against the image of American yokelry: "Making his progress up and down the Main street of little Dayton, surrounded by gaping primates from the upland valleys of the Cumberland Range, his coat laid aside, his bare arms and hairy chest shining damply, his bald head sprinkled with dust. . . ."

Mencken was the master of easy targets, he could hit the center of almost any barn door with a wonderful bang; and Mr. Simon is a not unpromising disciple. He is good, for instance, on bad movies—on Billy Wilder's boxoffice blend of mob-ethic and Hollywood sophistication:

> In *The Apartment,* the lovable hero is a special variety of pimp who lets his office superiors conduct their extramarital affairs in his apartment in exchange for maintaining, or perhaps advancing, his position with the firm.

or on Jules Dassin's mythogrified fustian:

> Perhaps the most characteristic episode of the picture [*Phaedra*], and the one most revealing of Dassin's mind, is the one in which Perkins is racing into suicide with his sports car. He turns on the radio, which is playing a Bach toccata, and lunges into a final soliloquy that so froze the blood in my fingers that I could get down only a few frag-

[1] ACID TEST, by *John Simon.* Stein and Day. $5.95.

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> ments of it: "A little banishment music, maestro, please. . . . Aha, nothing but the best for us, good old John Sebastian. . . ." And he continues to address "John Sebastian, old boy" with Dassin's characteristic condescension to that of which he is incapable—art.

He takes sardonic note of Thornton Wilder's "litanies of dullness," and documents Arthur Miller's efforts to club us into accepting mediocrity and self-pity as the new tragic norm. He pecks out immortal grains from the latest Ibsen "translation": ". . . such tidbits as 'What do you want to pay any mind to that for?' . . . 'When Oswald was first born,' 'I'm speaking only as a kind of metaphor' . . ." He reminds us that even priests have faces, in life as well as in art:

> Whereas Jouvet could make both the holiness and the unholiness of . . . [Tartuffe] larger than life-size, so that we stared into his hollow aspect as into a cave inhabited by an oracle or monster, Seigner's petty, fatty, bourgeois nastiness hardly conveys the sinisterness of hypocrisy's eponymous hero. The difference is like turning on your television set expecting Bishop Sheen, and getting Cardinal Spellman instead.

And he mounts a rambunctious, chapter-and-verse assault on George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy:*

> We learn also that Byron's plays are "what the Germans call *Lesedramen,*" which, for Mr. Steiner's benefit, is what we call closet drama, but that would be too plain and simple (which the Germans call *einfach*). These dramas now require fancifully formal recitation because of their sumptuousness—though one page earlier they consisted of "plain, rapid monosyllables"; they now "look resolutely to the past," though on the preceding page they carried "forward from the best of Ben Jonson." To cap this farrago, we are told that Byron is different from Shakespeare, for "Byron, on the contrary, rejoins the tradition of the medieval mystery cycle." But only a little before, Steiner was stressing Shakespeare's dependence on the medieval. . . .

Mr. Simon's exuberance is ultimately, like Mencken's, moral. He is interested in character, and he has a nose for bad character; his much-disappointed ambition is to discover, within the artifact of the book or the film or the play, a good man, somebody like James Agee in his movie criticism: ". . . I respect a man who can display his personal loves and hates, and I love a man who can display them innocently, and without ostentation. Thus the fact that in the course of these often despairing movie reviews the love of Mozart comes so frequently, genuinely, and somehow appositely, to the rescue, makes Agee the man and critic real to me."

Still, Mr. Simon's disappointments—like Mencken's—are generally far more vivid and instructive than his happy discoveries. Mencken on

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Conrad, or on the pleasures of poetry (a poem delights because it is a gorgeous tissue of lies), or on the Romantic composers, is about as cogent as a bashful pedant in love. Here is Mr. Simon, similarly infatuated, sinking without a trace into the pages of the New York Times Book Review: "Every frame of the film [*L'Avventura*] is a work of art." Or: "The story of Bernard Shaw and Molly Tompkins . . . is in equal measure comic and tragic, delightful and pathetic; as gay, sad, and absurd as life itself." Or a short course in literary cant: "Jones's work fulfills the basic requirement for a work of art: the perfect fusion of idea and expression, the oneness of content and form. . . . But it is not only in sustained passages of prose and poetry that *In Parenthesis* scales such heights. . . ." Or (hand clenched into fist and upraised): "Out of the cocoon of drunkenness and debauchery, misery and madness, come pictures and words that are—I say it unflinchingly—sublime." On the virtues of compulsory cogitation: "Yet what else can I say to a critic who forces us, first and last, to think?" Defying the avantgarde: "Furthermore, these are stories that are not afraid of being stories." Explaining art to the artist: ". . . in a play about ordinary people, language must be simple enough to be appropriate and believable, and yet also special and fine enough to rise above the ordinary, indeed, to go beyond prose into a kind of poetry."

It would be politic to conclude at this point, having complimented Mr. Simon on his palpable hits and rapped his knuckles for an occasionally indulged tendency toward the banal. The fact remains that his reputation—Mr. Auden attests to it, so does Dwight Macdonald—is as the contriver of ferociously apt puns and epigrams, the deft practitioner of a "baroque style" (Mr. Macdonald's term); "lucid, learned, witty, and, even when he is most savage, just and in good taste" (says Mr. Auden on the dustjacket); a master of *language* forsooth. One must therefore be as impolitic as Mr. Simon is reputed to be; for Mr. Simon, in his baroque posture, may very well survive as the sort of writer who, in fifty years, turns up in clever manuals on style as an example of the vicious and hollow artifice of a bygone day.

Mr. Simon is, indeed, the very negation of a stylist. Having no style at all, he girds himself now and then to manufacture one, and his most desperate method is to court his own predilection for cliché with the hope of inflating cliché into epigram. The result is, of course, to call the reader's attention all the more painfully to the predilection: "Ultimately, however, the proof is in the pudding, and there is no more pudding-headed dramaturgy around town than in . . ."; "the part . . . which seemed to fit Miss Meacham like a glove was no glove at all, but a shirt of Nessus"; "Even if in some respects . . . [Columbus] had no leg to stand on, we, without him, would have no ground on which to stand"; "There is . . . nothing wrong with horse sense, except when . . . one is reduced to scraping the bottom of the horse"; "Socrates, who thought that the syllogism is mightier than the hemlock"; "But you

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cannot capture love by sprinkling salt on its tail, or even by liberally sprinkling the tails of your poems with its name"; "She has got *Becket* down to a *t*; it is not her fault that it is not a double *t*"; ". . . a young poet who has not only digested his influences, but also discreetly wiped his mouth after the meal."

Moreover, discarding even the ghostly penumbra of sense that clings to cliché, Mr. Simon can plunge with the grace of a falling boulder into mere irresponsible word-play: "This may be slight; but it is not to be slighted"; "the turbid mass of the play comes alive only by fits and starts—not so much epic as epileptic theatre"; "The two main export articles of Bengal are its tigers and Tagores." One wonders about the integrity of a critic, given to such juggling, who offers a judgment like this one: "Among the players, only Michael Dunn, as the dwarf Tallow, gave evidence of a full-grown talent; the rest proffered pigmy performances." Or this milliner's sentence with the coy tail-feathers at the end:

> . . . his supreme contribution is the creation of a Dickey cosmos: a landscape into which breathe Dickey plants and in which are ensconced Dickey objects, through which race Dickey meters and metaphors overtaking the slower-moving Dickey animals and people under the gaze of emblematic Dickey-birds.

Then there are more ordinary varieties of bad taste. *Ad hominem:* "Haftmann is able . . . to evoke pictures with words—not so well as a poet,[2] perhaps, but a good deal better than that perennial effete young man or tailored and twitching spinster who is hired to do so in art columns and museum corridors." *Ad vaginam:* "Indeed, all this dragging in of love as a *deus ex vagina* is only a sorry testimonial to the essential lovelessness of these poets: the great climax proves merely a grand climacteric" (a sentence of which Mr. Simon is so fond that, in another piece, he quotes himself saying it). And, though it is the privilege of every manly fellow—especially if one of his principal occupations is as a critic of the Broadway theater—to abhor homosexuality ("that perennial effete young man"), Mr. Simon's energetic tactics against it do not exclude the eye-gouge and the rabbit-punch. On the beat poets:

> . . . there is a good deal of mingling—in every sense of the word—among their members.

Or on Gore Vidal and Cyril Ritchard ("*Romulus* closed, appropriately, after 69 performances, hoist, as it were, with its own petard"), Tennessee Williams, Noel Coward, at the expense of all of whom Mr. Simon has a great deal of equally robust fun.

This racket and swagger may wish to claim Mencken as its true ancestor; but Mencken at his most uninventive would not have mis-

[2] Mr. Simon takes the consistent position that poetry is better than something he calls "prose-poetry," which is better than prose, which in turn is better than plain writing.

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taken ill temper for bracing irreverence, platitude for apothegm, schoolboy paronomasia for wit, logorrheic smart-aleckry for style. No, Mencken is never so simple-mindedly and self-righteously rude, he neither blinks nor stares, he is a professional journalist and more exact, more essential, more civilized than this professional critic. Mr. Simon's talent, one is obliged to infer, is not up to his large ambitions as a commentator on man and on all the arts; his passions are easily stirred, but not often to a pitch of perception or fine articulateness that would make them interesting to anybody else. About Agee's volume of film criticism, Mr. Simon says that "it is, above all, a book of love and hate. It is a book of hate for everything that is routine, humbug, cowardice, stupidity in life, and therefore in movies; and of love for whatever is bold, individual, resourceful, and illuminating in movies, and therefore in life." This is a just account of Mr. Simon's own intentions; but *Acid Test* is not the crotchety and magnanimous book he intended to write.

ROGER SALE

The Death of Science Fiction[1]

WHEN KINGSLEY AMIS' *New Maps of Hell* appeared in 1961, it seemed as though science fiction had finally found the critic it had needed for so long. There has always been a defensiveness and a compensating aggressiveness about science fictioneers which led to infighting, cultism, jargon, and a trashy sort of Aristotelean definition mongering. But Amis is a breezy, witty man who for a time seemed destined to make his career out of locating cant and fraud in sensible ways. Amis, the moment one stopped to think about it, probably would like space suit literature and if he did, one felt, he would like it for the excellent reason that some of it is great fun to read. But *New Maps of Hell* was curiously disappointing. Although Amis has read immense amounts of science fiction, the book is strictly uningratiating going, with not even much genuine enthusiasm for the recommended texts. His praise is tepid and hedgy, two qualities it had seemed one could never associate with Kingsley Amis.

[1] SPECTRUM II, edited by *Kingsley Amis* and *Robert Conquest*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.50. THE WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by *Robert P. Mills*. Dial. $4.95. 7TH ANNUAL EDITION THE YEAR'S BEST S-F, edited by *Judith Merril*. Dell. 75 cents. A FALL OF MOONDUST, by *Arthur C. Clarke*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95.

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Now that Amis has edited, with Robert Conquest, two anthologies of science fiction, it is clear what was wrong. It is not that he loves science fiction less, but that he hates totalitarianism more. The first *Spectrum* had just enough chestnuts in it to make it seem that Amis and Conquest were really trying to put science fiction's best foot forward. But the second volume makes clear which street they have been working all along:

> Modern science fiction is still predominantly an American art; but it is not so exclusively. (Nor is it the case that the American writers have made it a vehicle for anything resembling chauvinism: on the contrary, it might be complained that so much of the satire which forms such an important component of the genre is directed against the various unpleasant actualities and potentialities of American life, that too little has been left over for the—far nastier—totalitarianisms which we in Europe are more accustomed to.)

This seems decent enough as a statement, but it turns out to be a terrible assumption on which to base an anthology. There are eight stories in the new *Spectrum,* and seven are maps of hell. A fact of contemporary life is observed—tranquilizers rob people of their lives, bureaucrats are blundering and malicious—and, in a story placed in the future, the contemporary fact has become a standard way of life in a world so horrifying that the reader is supposed to mend his ways. In a world run by soldiers, even the robots will eventually become cruel and the decent inventions of curious people can be turned into instruments of destruction. True, all true, and probably relevant as well. But when one sets out to map hell, he quickly finds that he is not the first cartographer, that most of the bays and mountains have already been pencilled in. When Amis and Conquest put seven such maps inside one book, the result is striking for the feebleness of each contributor's ability to come up with something more than slightly different from every other map of hell or anti-utopia. So two facts emerge from *Spectrum II.* First, the best story in the collection, "Bridge," by oldtimer James Blish, is the only one that does not have the willing scientist or engineer or dreamer done in by the American senator or general. Second, if this is representative of contemporary science fiction, science fiction is dead and maybe was never alive.

In search of fresher material, one turns from the amateur anthologizers to the professionals Robert P. Mills and Judith Merril. Mills's *The Worlds of Science Fiction,* like the *Spectrum* anthologies, is issued as a high class book; the editor has asked most of the big names in science fiction to pick his best story. Miss Merril's *7th Annual Edition The Year's Best S-F* is in paperback and restricts itself to material published in one year, 1961. If anything, Miss Merril comes off a little better, but the effect of both anthologies, though different from *Spectrum II,* is equally depressing.

The writers in these anthologies are almost all strictly professional.

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When they introduce a story they usually talk about "getting an idea," another term for "gimmick," and they love "stories that wrote themselves," a phrase that seems to mean, "stories not written at all." What is wrong is not the effort to make a living selling stories to magazines, but the way some apparently interesting ideas are left unexplored because the outline of a slick story comes easily and is allowed to serve as an adequate substitute for such exploration. Here there are more maps of hell, of course, the best one of which is a tiny sketch by Alice Glaser, "The Tunnel Ahead," in which New York eventually solves its traffic problem by destroying all cars and occupants in the Long Island tunnel at random times during the day. There are, here, some real space operas from *Saturday Evening Post*—the girl from the future who has turned a middle aged man's fancy is really his wife, the tired wanderers from space find Home in Pomeroy's Cove. There are poems by Conrad Aiken, pastiches by John dos Passos, cartoons by Jules Feiffer, stories by Muriel Spark and George P. Elliott, all included in a rather pathetic effort to show that some real writers are science fictionists under the skin. In order to be included, some definitional adjustments have to be made, so Miss Merril darts a note in front of suspicious items saying that perhaps these are not "science fiction," but they are "sci-fi" or "s-f." What these efforts show is that science fiction may not be dead because it is dull, as Amis and Conquest make it, but because it is indistinguishable from any other writing. Elliott's "Among the Dangs" does "fit" most definitions of science fiction, but then, so do *V., Henderson the Rain King,* and, I suspect, *The Education of Henry Adams.* To this Miss Merril would probably purr and say, "Precisely." To which it must be said to Miss Merril, that's not what I meant at all.

In order to see why, one need only turn to a story that looks more like what a normal man would call the genuine article, Anthony Boucher's "The Quest for Saint Aquin." In his special way, Boucher has been the best weekly reviewer in this country for years. He does not worry so much about providing definitions for science fiction or detective stories as he does about finding good books and tossing derivative ones to the drug stores and rental libraries. He edits as well as reviews, and he has helped make *Fantasy and Science Fiction* a readable magazine. And he occasionally writes; *The Adventures of the Baker Street Irregulars* and *Rocket to the Morgue* are the best sort of ingroup novel, and "The Quest for Saint Aquin" is a good story. After all heresies like Christianity have been stamped out, a disguised Roman priest goes in search of the bones of Saint Aquin. He is taunted but finally aided by a sluggish robot beast, a robass, only to discover that the dead saint has no bones, and was itself a robot. The ensuing debate between priest and robass about what report shall be given the Pope is the only genuinely dramatic, open-ended debate in all three anthologies, and the entire story ripples nicely with delicious ironies.

What this story does, as so few of the others do, is to treat a "story

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idea" as a genuine idea and the imagined world as one to be explored. One of science fiction's advantages, especially in the short story, is that it does not have to be self-conscious about "creating characters" because the idea or imagined world can be everything. In Boucher's story, "reason" and "faith" for a time become interesting terms because the "story idea" is acknowledged as a possible means rather than a sufficient end.

But science fiction can not only handle ideas. It seems potentially most strong as a way of working with narrative. Yet these anthologies are full of stories that are not quite stories but are instead easy-to-make satire which punches about as hard as Ezzard Charles. Still, at the back of Mills's collection is a quick piece by Alfred Bester, who refused to have a favorite story and gives notes for stories instead. Most of these are tired gimmicks and twists, but there is "A story about weather smugglers" right next to "There must be a place where you can go to remember all the things that never happened to you." These, too, must seem only fancy for those who have never read Bester's *The Demolished Man* or *The Stars My Destination.* But they are wonderful novels, headlong in their narrative rush yet clear about where the story must go, and so an admirer can only suggest to their author that he take the two notes for stories listed above and put them together.

But Bester's is a sick, melodramatic imagination and most people expect more controlled wildness if they are going to foray into science fiction. For them, the author to read is Arthur C. Clarke. Clarke is very noticeably missing from all three new anthologies, a fact which probably should be taken as a sign that the editors really do want to kill science fiction. For Clarke, while he is not a great writer, is often a very good one. He has suffered, as have Eric Ambler and Raymond Chandler, not from a lack of readers but from readers who have been unwilling to say that the pleasure derived from him is capable of being taken seriously. His latest novel, *A Fall of Moondust,* is not as good as *Childhood's End* or *The City and the Stars* (both of which are available, along with some stories, in a volume called *Across the Sea of Stars*), but still, for at least half its length, it is a fascinating book.

Clarke is a scientist, and the great advantage of scientists in science fiction is not that their worlds are "true" or that they do not try to bluff but that the good ones make a thorough effort to fill in the details of their invented worlds. *A Fall of Moondust* begins with a tourist ship setting out on a routine run over a sea of dust on the moon. After reading fifty half-baked stories, its first pages come as a revelation because they try to say just what it might feel like to move in a world with one-sixth of the earth's gravity and no atmosphere at all:

> Beyond *Selene's* observation windows, its gray dusty surface marched onwards unbroken until it reached the stars. Above it hung a waning crescent Earth, poised forever in the sky from which it had not moved in a billion years. The brilliant blue-green light of the mother world flooded this strange land with a cold radiance—and cold it

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> was indeed, perhaps three hundred below zero on the exposed surface.

The peculiar virtue of science fiction and its occasional advantage over fantasy is that "a billion years" and "three hundred below zero" have the solidity of scientific, if not of imaginable, fact. Furthermore, the apparently dead metaphor of the moon's surface marching until it reaches the stars becomes precise when it is made clear that this is the effect of having no atmosphere:

> It was hard to recognize the familiar constellations among this multitude of stars. The eye became entangled in patterns never seen from Earth, and lost itself in a glittering maze of clusters and nebulae. In all that resplendent panorama there was only one unmistakable landmark—the dazzling beacon of Venus, far outshining all other heavenly bodies, heralding the approach of dawn.

Again, "beacon" and "herald" are not simply flashy because on the moon the sun is down for fourteen days and Venus is always the herald of its dawn.

This is Clarke's forte, imagining what it would all look like. The story itself does no more than needs be done to render this world. The *Selene* is dragged under the sea of dust by a sudden quake (any other writer would jovially have called it a "moonquake"). First it must be located on a sea that seems totally unaltered by the quake and the sinking, then it must be rescued after the sun rises on a world where a human being would be burned up in the open air, and Clarke describes this very complex rescue more clearly than most writers can describe what happens when a car hits a telephone pole. It is only with the characters that Clarke falls down badly. The scenes aboard the sunken *Selene* are very reminiscent of those claustrophic weekends in bad detective stories, and the others are better only because Clarke tries less hard with them. It might be claimed that Clarke needs characters no more than Homer, which is true, but unfortunately Clarke tries to have characters and be an ordinary novelist.

But this is really only an annoyance, and *A Fall of Moondust,* by and large, remains one of the few recent books that fulfill the destiny of science fiction. Clarke's "science" serves as a check against the tendency of fantasy to be private and cultish, and his imagination is strong and dense enough to clarify his world so that there is less need for the boring "explanations" which leaden so much of the fiction. Science fiction at its best is fun precisely because it does take experimental fact or hypothesis and asks what life would be like if it were so. The "science" is needed, as Clarke makes clear, not so much in and for itself, but as a means of avoiding narrow political extrapolations on the one hand and the equally narrow mustiness of most fantasy. There are some imaginations for which this balance is precisely what they need; there are few Kafkas. As a matter of fact, there are few Arthur Clarkes.

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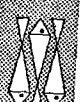

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